

PhotoWeek Northwest IX.15.2008

*40 images & texts made
at, below and above
Hidden Lake,
the South Wallowas
by Cliff Crego*

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Hidden Lake, Eagle Cap Wilderness—Alpine Lake at \pm 2200 meters (7173 feet).

A high cirque located at the far Northwest end of the East Eagle Valley,



Hidden Lake, Eagle Cap Wilderness—Alpine Lake at \pm 2200 meters (7173 feet).

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Hidden Lake is one the most beautiful jewels of the South Wallowas and the Eagle Cap Wilderness. East facing, strikingly peaceful and feminine in character, it is one of finest examples of an intact alpine watershed I've ever seen.



Hidden Lake
TOPO

On the road in the Northwest of America.

SUNSIGHT!

—for Mark Simmons

Sunrise. No!

Sunsight. Yes!

Fuller was right. Each morning,
the Earth turns to greet the Sun.

We are all turning.

The Muslim turns.

The Christian turns.

Even I turn, with my religion
without a name.

*Hidden Lake,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.5.2008*



SUNSIGHT!—
6:56 AM



Streamside
Fieldwork—
VII.30.08



Eagle Cap,
view from
Hidden Lake



Last Light on
Granite Mountain &
PILGRIM



Flowform
&
Destructive Movements



Frazier Butte &
SCIENCE. ART.
RELIGION.



Alpine Ensemble II
&
Two Miniatures



Pearly Everlasting &
A TOSS OF THE
COIN



Marker
Stonepines—
dying



[*Cathedral Rocks*](#)



[*Koch Snowflake*](#)
[*Flowform &*](#)
[**3 MINIATURES**](#)



[**Last Light at Pop**](#)
[**Creek Pass**](#)

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[**South/
North
Sister**](#)
[*—
first
light*](#)



[**Hut,
Black
Butte**](#)



[**Ponderosa
Pines—
after burn**](#)



[**Manzanita
Spring!**](#)

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Photograph by Cliff Crego © 2008 picture-poems.com
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SUNSIGHT! 6:56 AM Hidden Lake, Eagle Cap Wilderness—Alpine Lake at \pm 2200 meters (7173 feet).

. . . SUNSIGHT / SUNCLIPSE . . .

The great 20th century architect, poet-philosopher of design and inventor of the geodesic dome, *Buchminster R. Fuller* (1895-1983), introduced the complementary concepts of *sunsight* and *sunclipse* to replace the traditional words, *sunrise* and *sunset*. He argued—very convincingly in my view—that our language should reflect the actual turning or rotation of the spherical planet Earth on its axis, instead of the ancient illusion of the Sun making an arch over an essentially flat surface.

You can test your own intuitive perception of this movement in the following two ways: (1) See if you can answer without straining and quickly in which direction the Earth turns (My experience is that most people cannot, although everyone can tell you the Sun 'comes up' (is *sighted*) in the East, and goes down in the West (is *eclipsed* by the Earth) ; (2) Make with a hand the a rotating circle which corresponds in direction to the Earth's rotation. These two little test ought to be enough to convince most of us that we do indeed still live and think in terms of these powerful illusions of Flatland.

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Last Light on Granite Mountain, view East, Eagle Cap Wilderness
On the road in the Northwest of America.

PILGRIM

Armies have sergeants.

Monks have masters.

Pilgrims must go it alone.

Somebody give me a word for the energy
of breaking camp, and stepping out—
into the unknown.

*Camp Lost & Found,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, VIII.17.2008*

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Last Light at Pop Creek Pass, Eagle Cap Wilderness
On the road in the Northwest of America.

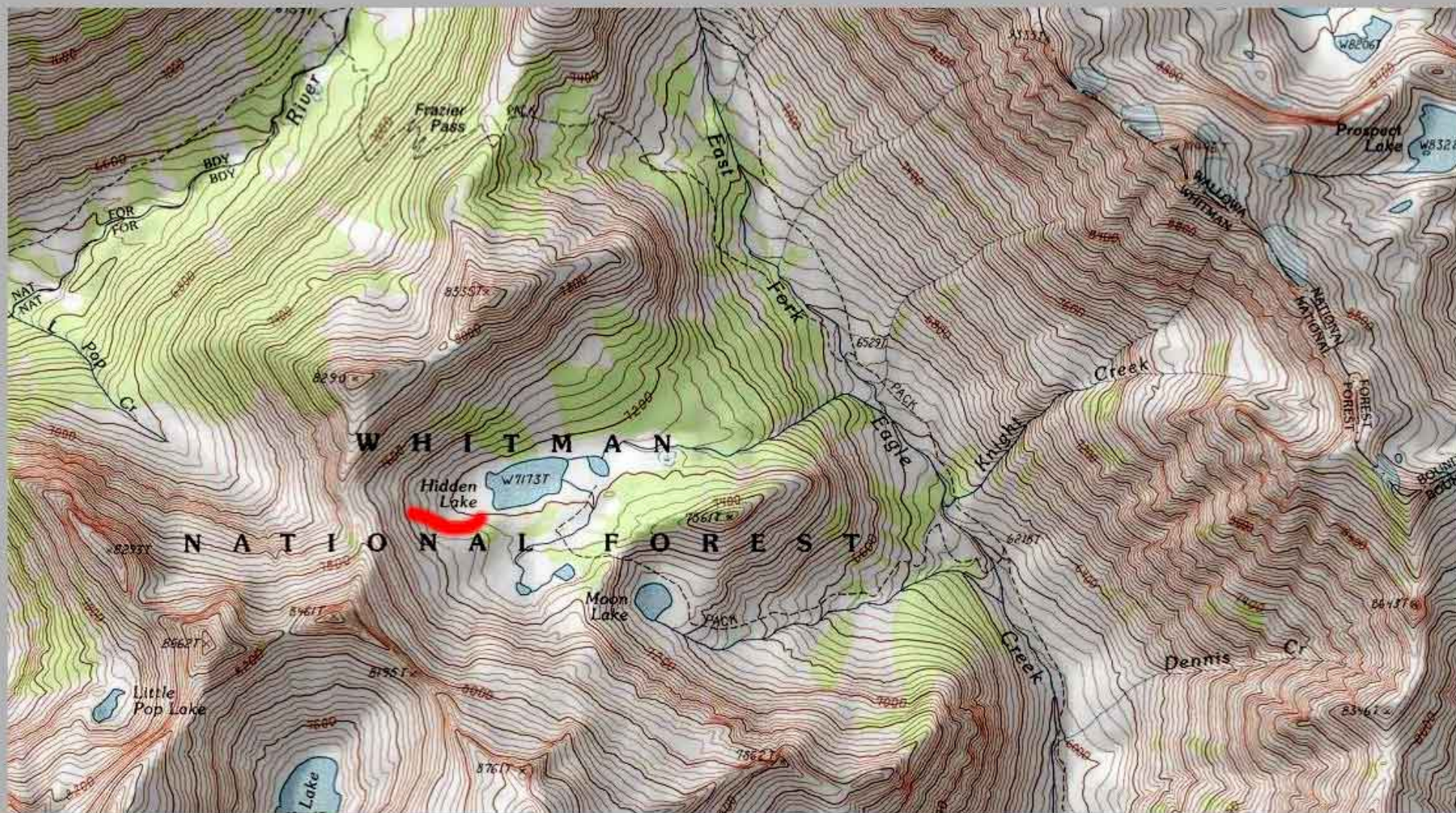
WEST WIND AT POP CREEK PASS

Each time I cross a pass, I suddenly remember something I always seem to be forgetting about the energy of insight, about how similar the two experiences are. This moment of crossing over, the epiphany that fills us as a new horizon appears before us and instantly rushes in. This is the energy, it seems to me, of sudden awareness, of suddenly discovering a new way of seeing or looking. Where does it come from? What is its source? It doesn't seem personal to me, a mere mechanical product of my own memory. No. Insight seems to be coming to us from 'someplace out there,' from someplace truly intelligent or divine, an *in-breathing* of the gods as the ancients used to say. We don't really know, do we? To me, it is just there, ever-present, like pure air, like healthy rich soil, like the clear fast-flowing water moving around me everywhere. One can either choose to listen to it, move with it, drink from it, or just walk right by indifferently and ignore it.

A steady west wind roars through the ridge crest firs and pines, blowing the last few thoughts of the past decisively away, and bringing the sound of what seems to be a distant ocean near. O view of the known world . . . I turn to look a last time at the valley from whence I've come.

Just before I step across into this new world, the flashing white outline of a nutcracker's wings catches the last light of day as it shoots straight up, sheering the strong winds like surf, and vanishing almost as quickly out of my field of sight. And all this as if to say, *"Ah, you poor people people. Will you ever learn to fly, learn to fly free of the fetters of fear, free of the fear of falling?"*

These are the thoughts that fill me, as I take out my headlamp, adjust its single bright beam, and start finding my way slowly down a steep talus slope as the darkness of night descends around me, happy to once more have been reminded about these things.



Hidden Lake TOPO, Eagle Cap Wilderness—Alpine Lake at ± 2200 meters (7173 feet).

A high cirque located at the far Northwest end of the East Eagle Valley, Hidden Lake is one the most beautiful jewels of the South Wallows and the Eagle Cap Wilderness. East facing, strikingly peaceful and feminine in character, it is one of finest examples of an intact alpine watershed I've ever seen.

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Eagle Cap, view from Hidden Lake (West), Eagle Cap Wilderness
On the road in the Northwest of America.

HOW TO PROTECT AN ALPINE MEADOW

Hike there.

Find water.

Sit.

Move as little,
and stay as long,
as possible.

*Hidden Lake,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.7.2008*

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Eagle Cap, view Northeast from evening Hidden Lake, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .



Cathedral Rocks, South Wallowas . . . (also sometimes called Castle Rock)

a 'blank page' composed of nearly vertical, four or five hundred meter massive limestone cliffs (\pm from 1600 to 2050 m.) waiting for the ambitious rockclimber to put up new routes.

As far as I know, no one has of yet
attempted a first ascent.

Southern counterpole of the *Matterhorn* of Hurricane Canyon and located on the westside of the spectacular East Eagle Valley, is the formation I like to call *Cathedral Rocks*. This seems to me a good name because of the manner in which it lights up with early morning light, especially when seen from the valley floor during the summer months. Like many places of great power and dignity in the Wallowas, Cathedral Rocks has been somehow given a name, *Granite Cliff*, which seems to me rather like a lame cartographic afterthought. First and foremost, the formation is limestone and not granite. Secondly, these generic names are like calling your beloved family dog 'dog.' But in all seriousness, the point is not so much *what* a formation is called—*Castle Rock* is another name some oldtime locals know—but rather more the fact that names are important because they are how we weave together our own internal maps of the poetry of a place.

If you want a direct sense of how this works, all you have to do is look up at this mountain with a small child. They will point at it with the index finger of either the left or right hand—the digit with seeks to *indicate* the meaning of things—and ask its name. With children, bad names confuse, whereas good names will light their faces up much like Granite Cliff itself begins to glow with the first light of a new day. This is a crucial part, it seems to me, of how a young person grows up with deep, natural roots in the spirit of a place.

CATHEDRAL ROCKS

Strong, bold, simple, clear lines.

A cloud passes by . . .

Strong, bold, simple, clear lines.

*Hidden Lake,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.7.2008*



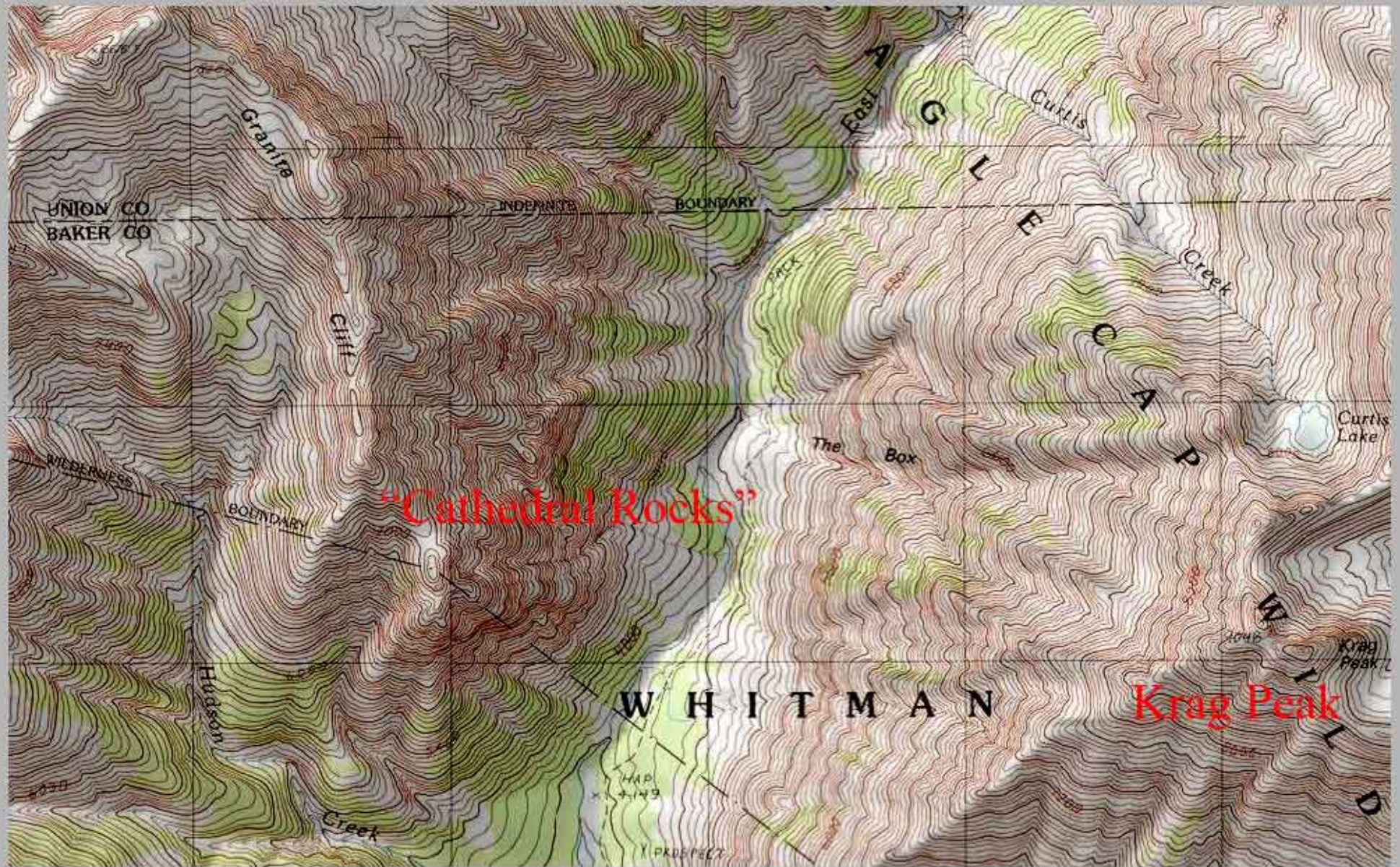
[Catherdral Rocks](#)
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Cathedral Rocks TOPO, South Wallowas . . . a 'blank page' composed of nearly vertical, four or five hundred meter massive limestone cliffs (\pm from 1600 to 2050 m.) waiting for the ambitious rockclimber to put up new routes. As far as I know, no one has of yet attempted a first ascent.

Southern counterpole of the *Matterhorn* of Hurricane Canyon



*Krag Peak with Muir Lake (Crater Lake) from a trailless West / East ridge crossing
just under Red Mountain I call Bowhunter Pass—view West . . .
Eagle Cap Wilderness
On the road in the Northwest of America.*

Coffee—the Good from the Bad

*for the makers of the documentary, Black Gold:
Wake Up and Smell the Coffee (2006),
Nick & Marck Francis*

I tried to give up coffee, once. It gave me a headache, so I never tried again. But now, as I brew my morning cup, I see before me a large sorting room filled with Ethiopian women. Some of the women are old, some are young, but all wear colorful headscarfs, and all are, it seems to me, beautiful. The women are separating *good*, unroasted, sundried coffee beans from *bad* coffee beans. One at time; all by hand. They are paid about fifty cents a day. And all of this for me, for you, for the pleasure of our morning coffee.

Truly, the day of reckoning is now clearly upon us—upon you, upon me, in which some even more subtle, invisible, unseen hand of judgement shall separate us, too. *The good, from the bad.*

MORAL COMPASS?

A question for our time? *"Have we lost our moral compass?"*

"Nonsense!—say the Devil's banker. "In the much-will-have-more of the universe of money, there is no North and South, no Good and Bad! The is only more, more, more!"

GRACE

Bless those who grew this food.

May they also be happy, well-fed, and safe.

Bless them, brothers and sisters, all.

*Camp Lost & Found,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, VIII.17.2008*



Dipper Falls, trajectories, Eagle Cap Wilderness
On the road in the Northwest of America.

ON THE NECESSARY SEPARATION OF ETHICS FROM RELIGION

One of the great fundamental insights upon which the US Constitution is based is not just the idea of the balance of power, derived from Roman law, but also, and of equal importance and significance, the strict separation of religion and state. It seems to me, that clear thinking and a new set of moral problems which confronts the world as a whole now demand that in a similar way ethics be separated from religion. Why, you ask? Because, in view here explored, in the theater of moral debate, both our shared intelligence and common humanity ask that we check our cloaks of sectarian beliefs at the door.

For with moral questions—and this is in my view beyond all doubt—if there is to be meaningful dialogue, just as in a republic no one may claim to be above or outside the rule of law, in the critical discussions of dialogue there may be no claim made to absolute authority. So how then are we to decide what is good, right and just? Well, I would say by placing calmly and with great respect the arguments, the evidence, the facts, and the competing theories on either side of the scales of Truth. And then weighing their relative merits and defects. For if we really consider this process carefully, what is truly sacred is the motionless, neutral center upon which the fair, unbiased balance of the scale depends.

In this way, as new ethical imperatives become established and codified as part of the main body of accepted law, we may come to see that it is this movement of coming to ethical truth together voluntarily itself by means of reason and intelligence—and not by any external, coercive force of King, or mere President, or Pope, or God—in which we can quite rightly and whole-heartedly put our trust.

*Camp Lost & Found,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, VIII.17.2008*



Alpine Ensemble, view South above Pop Creek Pass, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .

NEW IDEAS

The greatest instrument of change is the new idea. It brings together both for the individual and the collective our hitherto scattered and confused creative energies into one unified direction. The new idea does not show us the details or technicalities of *how*, but rather the crystal-clear necessity of *why*. And that makes all the difference.

RELATIONSHIP

The interval between two tones, the shadow cast by a tree, the flashing sparkles of waves on a stream or leaves on a tree, all are not static *'things,'* but rather movements of relationship.

Perception is always a question of relationship.

A MIND THAT DOES NOT AGE

One advantage of eyes that grow weaker with age is that one sees less and less of all the disturbing details reflected in the unforgiving mirrors of decline. But then, if we are lucky, we may also discover that the mind's own *inner* eye, as we learn to see more deeply into the nature of seeing and learning themselves, grows younger, brighter, and ever-more resilient with this great gift of each new turn of the living Earth, each new passing day.

*Hidden Lake,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.5.2008*



Holly Brook, graceful meanders, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .

ON THE NECESSITY OF ROADLESS AREAS (II)

Because of the near complete motorization of North American culture, roadless areas have gained in the past twenty years or so tremendously in significance. Now, at road's end, we also reach the spiritual end of what I see as a defining imbalance of the made-in-the-USA metaphysics of the world, namely, a remarkably one-sided way of thinking about freedom.

North Americans seem largely to take a self-centered view of freedom, what we might call *the freedom to* of the individual. Why might this be imbalanced? In my view, it is because it fails to take adequately into consideration the possible harm caused by the potentially negative consequences of our actions as they reverberate out into wider contexts, into the wider community.

It is really very simple, this idea that freedom always has two sides, the *freedom to*, and the *freedom from*. Take the example known well to every big city apartment dweller: I want to listen to my loud music in the middle of the night; You want to sleep. So to make life liveable, we have to work out some kind of a balanced agreement between us. What I want to suggest is that all freedom works essentially in this same way. And what is more, individuals and cultures may be characterized by which side of the two they tend to give emphasis, give the most significance and legal protections. We can easily imagine the extremes, and it is good to do so for the sake of clarity. On the one hand, we have the state of absolute lawlessness, where every one just does as they please; And on the other, we have the state of total control where no one is allowed to do anything at all freely. Whereas North American culture has evolved an exemplary balanced form of liberty in the areas of freedom of speech and expression, it seems to me extraordinarily *imbalanced* when it comes to the three key defining areas of finance, private property. or anything powered by hydrocarbons. If I can make money, if its my land, or if its my car or truck or dirtbike, 4-wheeler or snowmachine, the basic assumed metaphysics is, "*Get out of my way!*"

Even though the original idea of setting aside large tracts of land without roads of any kind undoubtedly originally concerned itself with the harm wrought upon the environment

by the negative side-effects of mechanized travel, roadless areas now also offer us a place to experience the benefits first hand of a more balanced idea of freedom. In addition to the freedom to, we now have a complementary freedom from. Predictably, the freedom from part of the equation deals mostly from the unwanted by-products of car culture, like freedom from noise, or the freedom from air pollution.

Like water meanders through an alpine bog, finding a kind of living balance by turning now to the left, now to the right, I think this more balanced idea of freedom is something beautiful to behold. But don't take my word for it. It might be worth making a bit of an effort to get out of one's car and hike up into one of those areas just to rediscover for oneself what freedom is really all about.

*Hidden Lake,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.5.2008*

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*Tall Bog Onions at Holly Brook (Allium validum), highly edible & must
prized by the members of the Lewis & Clark Corps of Discovery,
Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .*



Sibbaldea,
September aspect



Western
Hawkweed

THE DIFFERENCE OF BUT A HALF A STEP

Bright sun on granite,
a major key ascending
beyond the highest peaks,
beyond the most distant of stars.

A cloud passes by with misty rain . . .

Instantly, all changes to shades of
dark, wet, volcanic rock,
a minor key descending
with roots to the middle of the Earth.

The happy and the melancholy,

two sides of one movement . . .

How could I ever choose?

O gods of the most divine of soundscapes, forgive

us that philosophers no longer ponder

this difference of but a half a step between 3rds.

O mystery of creation!

My lyre of peace shall be forever tuned

and tempered

to both.

*Muir Lake,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.12.2008*



Frazier Butte (Frazier Pass is not shown, but just to the left of
the descending ridgeline on the left side of the image, view East . . .)
Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .

SCIENCE. ART. RELIGION.

Science begins when we are willing to drop a theory
when it is contradicted by fact;

Art begins when we are willing to tear down a museum
and put up a new one when it no longer fits what we
see as beautiful;

Religion begins when we are willing to drop rigid belief
and claims to absolute authority because we have seen
that they are the source of the barriers of barbed-wire
that divide us.

Although urgently necessary, attempting to unite Science,
Art and Religion in their present state of disarray would
certainly be folly. It would surely result in hedious hybrids
like a Mozart Mass pumped up with drums and bass guitar,
or a rank pseudo-science constructed consciously as a
smokescreen for the fundamentalist conditioning of the minds
of the young. And yet their fragmentation corrupts the
highcountry springs of our collective creativity. Better to
take down with great care and a sustained seriousness the
arbitrary dams of their division—one at a time and all at
once—and let them flow naturally of their own accord
together as one.

*Hidden Lake,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.8.2008*



New Leaves, Balm or Black Cottonwood (Populus trichocarpa), leaves of young trees are more slender (oblong-lanceolate) than on more mature trees. South Wallows . . .

—On the road in the American Northwest.

POPLAR OF FORGIVENESS

A poplar tree offers me shade,
moving from ridge to valley,
I rest a while.

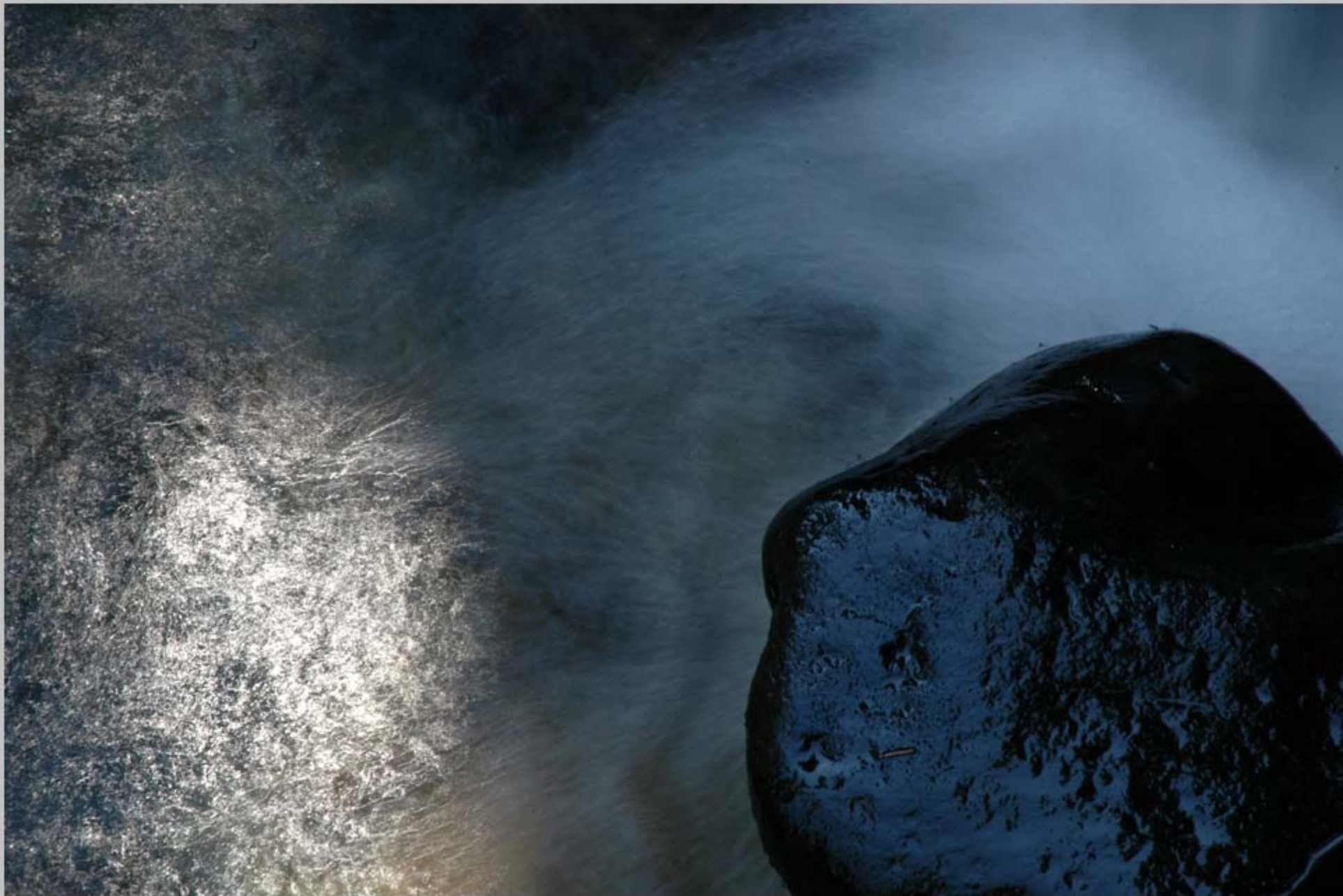
It's the sound, the sound
of the wind moving in the leaves,
a sound wholly absent at the more austere altitudes,
that washes away like the water of a Lourdes
all the hurts and pains of the past.

How we long to go back, go back and set straight
our mistakes of the past, to say
that it wasn't like that, or that
we didn't intend things to turn out
the way that they did.

But the sound carries these thoughts
away to somewhere else I know not where.
I open my eyes. A leaf, already yellow, falls.
A chickadee flutters by.

I must live a better life.

*Cottonwood Place,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, VIII.4.2008*



Dipper Falls, rock-water flowform, Eagle Cap Wilderness
On the road in the Northwest of America.

ON THE LENS OF PERCEPTION & THE CONTRADICTION OF WASTE

Just as it is an important ritual for me to clean my camera lenses carefully every day—removing smudges and dust, but being careful not to scratch the glass, which I have to confess I'm not very good at—so too it seems essential for me to every day clear the lenses, so to speak, of my perception. Philosophy is the cloth with which I do this.

All seeing is conceptual. That is, a concept is like a lens or a filter which in a powerful way shapes or in-forms what we see. So part of my daily practice as a kind of philosopher / artist is both the cleaning up of old, and the learning of new concepts. For instance, I learn and begin to study a new variety of mountain plant, say a species like Alpine Fleecflower, a member of the Buckwheat family which I had not seen before coming into the Wallowas. As Thoreau remarked long ago, it is surprising that after one has learned to recognize a new species one suddenly begins to see it everywhere. At a more subtle level we can also begin to observe how a new concept actually works, in this case a new plant species. What did I see before I had the Fleecflower concept? Just an undifferentiated green background? It's an interesting problem.

At the same time this cloth of philosophy clears away old or no longer useful concepts. This might be necessary if a concept is no longer relevant, or worse, misleading or false.

Take the concept of waste, for instance. Now waste might admittedly seem at first glance to be an uninteresting, most would say, banal thing. After all, in normal everyday life, waste is that which we want to be rid of. But from the view of conceptual philosophy—this mundane, ordinary concept of waste may be seen to have extraordinary significance because of a deeply hidden contradiction between how we think about waste, on the one hand, and how waste actually works in the natural world, on the other. (Notice that here, philosophy is a lot like intellectual play, because we are allowed—indeed even encouraged—to make sweepings statements like these, and then explore by means of

image, reason and logic where they might take us. It is rather like trying out a new lens or filter and seeing what we can see, what we can do with it.)

Now, a recurrent theme of mine is that waste as either a concept or fact does not exist in Nature. One of the signature features of Mother Earth's web of life, in my view, is that what is discarded by one organism—the excrement, body parts, gases, etc.—becomes the essential food of another. So there are no one-way streets, or dead-end roads where junk, especially toxic junk, just piles up in the natural world. Instead, the movement of the cycles just keeps turning and turning as the energies of life continuously in a marvelous and wonderful way transform themselves.

From Nature's perspective, what we call waste is simply a failure of design. Take a new iPhone, for example. Sophisticated, charming, information technology, yes. Perhaps in some ways even revolutionary. But why is not closed-loop recycling and easy repair designed into all the iPhone's components right from the very start? I would argue simply because the present concept of waste necessitates that we turn a blind eye to the destructive consequences of our all-pervasive throw-away lifestyle and the metaphysics of design that supports it. Indeed, I would go on to suggest that this really rather remarkable devil's loop of seeing waste as an unfortunate but necessary evil of technological innovation has in a way become a central defining illusion of present Western culture. In other words, we may well be remembered when the large-scale strata of history come to be explored in the distant future not by what we have created but more by what we throw away.

Briefly, of crucial importance is the ethical dimension of this culture of waste. For example, to stay with the iPhone for a moment, is Apple behaving unethically by not designing technology for zero waste? I would argue most definitely. And so am I if I purchase their products, which I do. For what we are really doing is passing on a whole ugly heap of exceedingly complicated and expensive toxic cleanup crises to our children.

To conclude is this philosophical spirit, just let me say that an important implication of this idea that waste is a contradiction, is that it offers us the clearest and simplest way to approach massively complex global problems like air or water pollution, soil contamination, or climate change. It is simple because we could not only clean up the problem at its physical, but also, and in a way more importantly, at its conceptual, philosophical

source.

*Camp Lost & Found,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, VIII.17.2008*

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Western Hawkweed, skyview at 2200 m. (Hieracium albertinum) Member of the Aster family.

Hawkweed is a perennial which is densely pubescent with long white hairs and a milky sap found in the entire plant. According to Charles Johnson,

Hawkweed was used as a source of chewing gum by Native Americans.

Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .



Hawkweed
Closeup &
A MAN OF ONE CUP

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Western Hawkweed Leaves—close-up (Hieracium albertinum) Member of the Aster family.

Hawkweed is a perennial which is densely pubescent with long white hairs and a milky sap found in the entire plant. According to Charles Johnson,

Hawkweed was used as a source of chewing gum by Native Americans.

Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .

Close-up photography is for me a form of meditation *on form*. A meditation on *structure*, on how the normally not clearly visible parts of especially the wonderful world of plants fit & work together.

In my dumstruck, simplistic way, I find myself frequently saying aloud, "*Why isn't this enough?*" Why isn't this revelation of Nature's beauty not enough to turn us all into humble and devoted monks, scientists and artists?

This is what I think of as *the mystery of the middle realm*. The central image of this middle realm—a space residing between *the incomprehensibly small and the incomprehensibly large*—is for me a three-fold composite: the branching structures of a tree, a river, and a fundamental tone with its overtones. I'll come back to this idea in another miniature, but for now, just let me say that I believe that we—despite the great and fantastic achievements of Western science—do not understand this middle realm very well. Why do I say this? Well, because it is in a self-evident, obvious way, demonstrated in the short-comings of what we make & design.

Take one of my recurrent themes: the imposition of the straight-line grid that car-culture designers overwhelming seem to prefer. (If there are anywhere exceptions in North American to this rule, the burden of proof is on you.) In the Northwest, the rectilinear pattern dominates all, resulting in a strident '*wolftone*' or contradiction with the immense beauty and spirit of the land itself. Indeed, I might have expanded the phrase had the measure allowed in the last little piece below to: "*In the West, Cut down. Dig up. Pave straight roads. Put barbed-wire around the rest.*"

Here then is a little set of three *37-step poems** which plays with this theme of the unfortunate misfit between natural and cultural structures. The "*man of of one cup*" is in this case me. This is really true; that is how I live. (Well, *two cups*, if I include my thermos...) I long ago embraced and took my vows, as it were, with Lady Poverty. This, I find liberating. I periodically go down into the low country to pay my bills, get provisions, see friends, and do my necessary web work, etc. But each time I return to the mountains, I say, "*Ah, the end of survival, and the beginning of living.*" One of the first things I do is go to a fast, clear-running stream, and wash my cup.

One Cup Only

(I)

Empty, round metal
cup I use every day, how I've
grown fond of the feel in my hand,

center with

gifts from far and near.
Hot teas steeped in cold spring water.

(II)

Square grid without a
center, towns built with quick money,
with gold, whiskey, easy women.

Home was

always someplace else.
O Silver Maple, so far West.

(III)

Boom days of easy
plunder now a thing of the past,
Speed's run flat dead knowing that the

direction

was wrong. Cut down. Dig
up. Put barbed-wire around the rest.

Camp Lost & Found,

Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.15.2008

*In order for a variation form like this to really flower, one needs to do them in sets or sequences. Try reading them out-loud to get a sense of how the rhythms and accents change in surprising ways while still keeping to the basic 37-step pattern.

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*Alpine Ensemble II, above Hidden Lake,
Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .*

TWO METAPHYSICAL MINIATURES

(I)

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

Some people make us smart; Others, make us stupid.
Some people make us happy, Others, make us sad. If
dialogue and compassion form two sides of the triangle
of friendship or relationship, this might be then the third—
encouragement, or the sustained, mutual generation of the
energy that makes change, discovery, makes real creative
work possible. Truly, this is how the world becomes a
better place, one person at a time.

(II)

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

Have you ever thought about how the world of Nature no
longer seems to inform or shape our manner of movement
or dress? Or why, in a more general way, contemporary
culture no longer seems shaped or informed by a fecund
interaction of human creativity and place? Is this not in part
because of an insidious process of not physical but rather
spiritual colonization?

In the past, the church wanted us to believe this or that—
the actual details of content are in my view irrelevant—as a
means of spiritual dominion and control; Now, the *instruments
of commerce*—corporations, governments, and, well, yes, once
again, churches—all wish in similar ways to take possession
of our souls. They do this by conditioning our likes and dislikes.
If this seems more to characterize the dark ambitions of a
totalitarian society and not the proud badge of freedom worn
by Western-style democracies, please consider that by the time
the average student arrives at a North American university, he
or she will have seen about 12,000 hours of television commercials.
Extraordinary, by any standard, and especially in need of an
explanation as to why this is tolerated. These new embodiments

of commerce and control thereby gain great influence over how we vote, how we spend our money, and how and what we believe is true and important. This they have done, and with amazing success.

If you think this exaggeration, imagine this: put a young person from China, India, Japan, Australia, North / South America, or Europe on a forest path anywhere in the world. Remarkably, they will in a nearly identical way look wholly out-of-place. Truly, they will look as lost as if they were fresh off the streets of downtown LA. Their movements will all seem to emerge from one simple, common, programmed language. These movements say, "*Hey, dude! I speak MTV! Get out of the way.*"

Revolt of youth? Quite doubtful. That would require at the very outset that one give away the keys to the car, tear up every logo in sight, smash the CD-player and TV.

Perhaps the greatest endangered species of Western culture has become now the *free spirit*, the one who can think, see and act with intellectual integrity and independence—*right or wrong*—for oneself.

I say to you, to outfit oneself in style for the coming peaceful, first-and-foremost *inward* revolution, one need not buy a single thing.

Now Imagine that!

*Camp Lost & Found,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.15.2008*



Holly Lake, September aspect, view from above looking East, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .
On the road in the Northwest of America.

When I asked Mark Simmons, former Speaker of the House in Oregon and now a leader in Rural Development, what he would name the beautiful little tarn above his camp at Hidden Lake, without a moment's hesitation he answered, "*Holly Lake*." For his daughter, Holly, who was standing near by with her mother, Joni—as she smiled and blushed in her charming way. "*Excellent*," I said. And so we gave a bit more shape in name and word and sound to the enchanted high alpine landscape above East Eagle Valley and the South Wallowa mountains.



Mark Simmons
at
Hidden Lake



Mark—
getting
ready to
pack out...



Holly Simmons,
at Hidden Lake

SEEING

I tell myself:

To study Nature, learn to see;

To learn to see, watch seeing in action;

To watch seeing in action, observe the blocks.

When the blocks are clearly seen—like *fear, greed, impatience, desire, etc.*—seeing begins to free itself like a river after its arbitrary dams are breached. I tell myself: The intelligence of the learning eye always looks both ways.

HOW THE WORLD CHANGES

Don't waste time trying to save corrupt politicians.

How much better to teach the young! It takes but nine years to educate a new generation of enlightened scientists, farmers, artists and healers. At the entrance way to this school of a wholly new way of being stands but a single sign with three imperatives: *"All those who enter here, leave behind your old ideas of war, of fear, of waste."*

DIALOGUE

The great and wonderful journey of dialogue begins when we come together with but six simple words:
"I don't know. Let's find out!"

*Hidden Lake,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.5.2008*



Holly Brook,
meanders



[Alpine Ensemble,](#)
[above Pop Creek Pass](#)



[Krag Peak &](#)
[Muir Lake](#)



[Bog Onion at](#)
[Holly Brook](#)



[Dipper Falls](#)
[Step Cascade &](#)
[September Stream—](#)
[a trio 37-step of](#)
[poems](#)



[Moonrise Over](#)
[Red Mountain / White](#)
[Granite](#)
[Mountain](#)



[Fall Alpine](#)
[Fleeceflower—](#)
[close-up](#)



Dipper Rock<
Whisper Flow
&
TWO PATHS



ON THE CULT
OF COMPLICATION

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at the **PhotoWeek online store**, click [here](#). Or view as [SLIDESHOW](#) . . .
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South/
North
Sister
—
first
light



Hut,
Black
Butte



Ponderosa
Pines—
after burn



Manzanita
Spring!

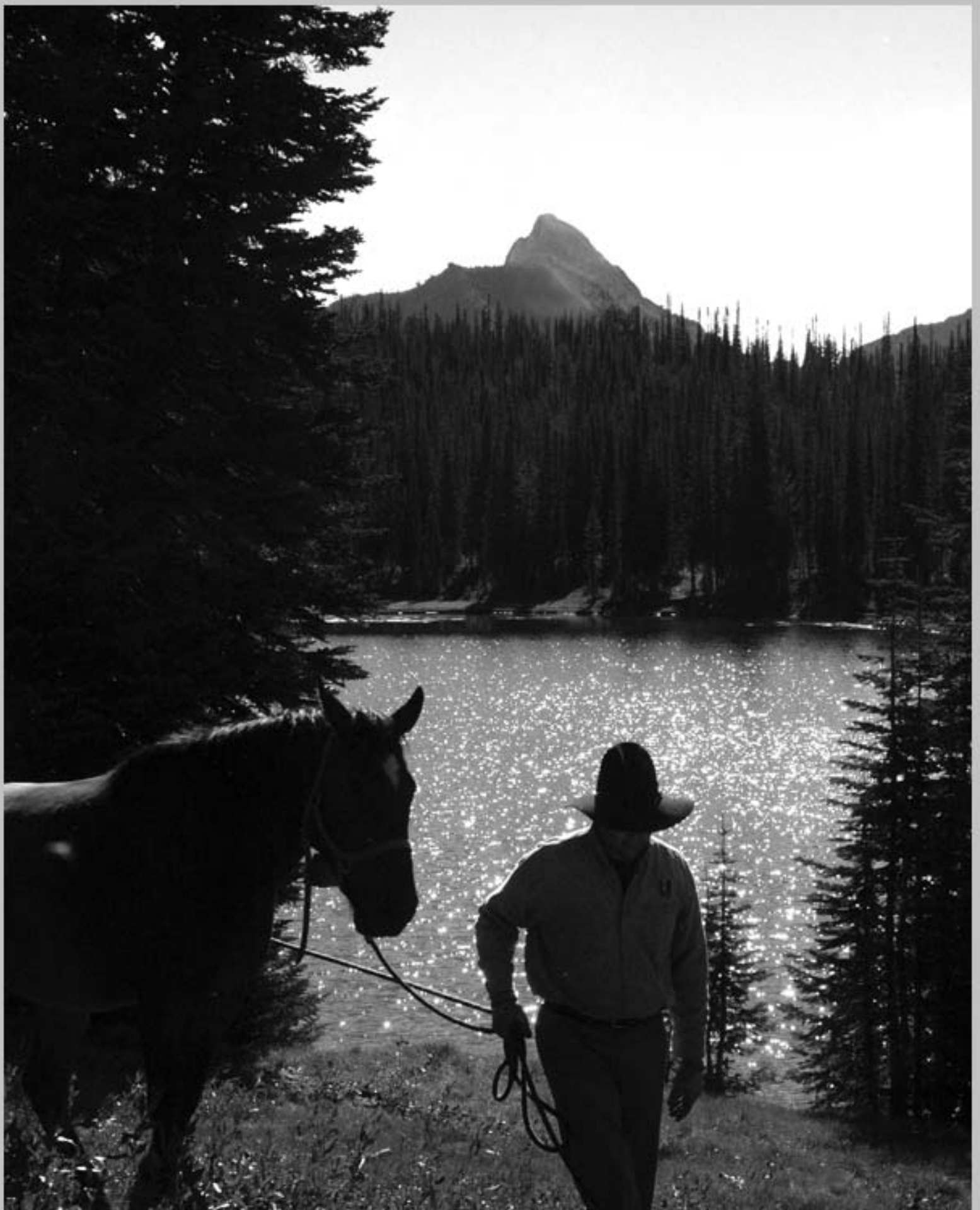
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(created: **VII.27.2008**)



Mark Simmons, at his camp at Hidden Lake, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .





Holly Simmons, at Hidden Lake, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .



*Pearly Everlasting with Blue Butterfly Duo, just under Horton Pass,
Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .*

One of my constant themes is a difference I see—for better or worse—between mere *mechanical randomness* like that which a computer so easily generates, and chance. Chance I see as something far more mysterious. An event may seem like chance only because its matrix of causes lies outside the field of our comprehension; Or it may at other times appear as an almost divinely inspired confluence of hitherto separate streams of fate, as when two strangers unexpectedly encounter each other on a path and instantly recognize and are bonded by a kind of deep sympathetic resonance. I in no way think that such a view must retreat into a kind of dreamlike romantic subjectivity. On the contrary, such an open view of chance appears to me almost unavoidable as we by hard thinking reach the end of the road of logic and reason, and enter into the pathless wilds of the unknown. This is where Art & Science, I feel, so easily join hands and walk together, for who would deny that *what we do not understand* of reality is a vastly—perhaps infinitely so—greater realm or domain or area than that which we can truly say we know or understand. And who would deny that image and metaphor are not just as necessary items of our equipage as mathematics and formal model when it comes to exploring new and still uncharted terrain.

So, in this spirit, here is a little flutter of a piece which turns around this idea of chance and what I call the butterfly way . . .

A TOSS OF THE COIN

A fork in the trail appears,
with two wooden signs, each pointing
in opposite directions, each
of equal appeal.
Which way shall I follow?

I could stop to study my map.

Or wait a while to ask a fellow passerby.

Or I could leave it to the gods of chance

and toss a coin,

heads to the left,

tails to the right.

Always ready and willing to bet on good

fortune, I give my lucky nickel a stout thumb-flick

up into the clear morning air and watch

it spin for the longest time as if in slow motion,

then, to my amazement, miracle of miracles,

before my disbelieving eyes my coin

metamorphoses into the most

beautiful butterfly I ever beheld.

What to do? Of course:

Follow the butterfly way!

*Benchmark Camp,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.15.2008*



Pink Mountain Heather—close-up July aspect (Phyllodoce empetriformis),

above Hidden Lake, High Wallows . . . On the road in the American Northwest.

LOVE RESONANCE

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

See the electronic keyboard—*the synthesizer*—with
its brittle octaves made of wired concrete, and its complete
lack of *sympathetic resonance*.

When similar sounds no longer spontaneously vibrate
together, when like sounds no longer reflect one another,
when like sounds no longer mirror each other's energies,
upon which instrument shall we play our songs of love?
Upon which instrument shall we teach our children the
principles of nature's way?



Metolius—
Water. Water. Water.



*Dipper Rock, Whisper Flow, Cliff River watershed,
Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .*

War pays, literally . . .

More than two thousand years ago, Aristotle (384 - 322 bce), in his classic *ETHICS*, states uncharacteristically as if it were self-evident and not in need of logical demonstration, that we prepare for, and wage war in order to achieve peace, and for no other reason. I disagree. War and Peace are not contraries, not opposites; they are in my view utterly unrelated, in the same way that what we think of as 'evil' and 'good' are also unrelated and not opposites.

The metaphysics behind these thoughts is important. For, if we believe that war is inevitable, and that we therefore must prepare for it, then the thought itself becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy and hence one of the primary causes of the future wars that it sees as inevitable, and so on. And on, and on.

Projecting evil out into the world as an actual independent force out to do us in, say as the Lucifer of Dante's *Inferno*, also leads, in my view, to equally imbalanced ways of thinking.

This might be easier to see if we think for a moment on music. Now, we performers make mistakes. It happens all to the time, and to the best of us. Now imagine that if we, every time we erred—that is, strayed from the good, the right, the beautiful—simply said, "*Lucifer made me do it!*" That would not get us very far, would it? Because we would be looking for the source of our mistakes—in other words, the 'evil' that has befallen us—somewhere outside of ourselves, which is, of course, absurd.

Well, my contention is that with war and peace it is no different. In other words, war is not a means to peace; it is simply a mistake. A very grave mistake, indeed, one which has become in a way the world's most serious illness. After all, it is clearly irrational in the extreme to devote half of the world's resources to the slaughter of one another in greater and greater numbers and by ever-more scientific and efficient means.

This, I think, is clearly an ethical problem. Not a religious one. And not a political one. Why? Because it is a problem of the heart,

of compassion. And, in my view, as an ethical problem it even trumps climate change because the waste generated by the machinery of war is itself a primary cause of anthropogenic climate forcings—somebody please do the numbers here because I have no doubt that they are surely horrifying—and not the other way around. At least, not yet.

And the economy? Unpayable mountains of debt? Well, *"it's the war, stupid."* Preparations for war in even a healthy economy will tend to drive that economy towards collapse, because war preparations are by far the greatest destroyer of wealth, even when your industries still produce more than just weapons, and even when you have not borrowed your way into a debt so deep in order to finance those war preparations that it will take generations of hard work to clean up the mess.

So, why is this not a theme of political debates? Because, as the brilliant Marilyn Waring says in the Terre Nash's documentary, *Sex, Lies and Global Economies* (1998), *"The cost of a single new nuclear submarine equals the annual education budget of 23 developing countries with 160 million school-age children. This is war. War is marketable. War pays, literally."*

That's why.

TWO PATHS

*"It is no longer the choice between violence
and non-violence in this world;
it's non-violence or non-existence."*

from *Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*'s last major address,
April 3rd, 1968, *"I Have Been to the Mountain Top."*

One of the most persistent and pernicious illusions
of control is the ancient idea that we can come to peace
by way of war. It is this thought that conflict is inescapable

and unavoidable that leads us to incessantly prepare for it.
Yet, preparing for war is not like preparing for fire, or for
a hurricane. No. Preparing for war is a primary cause of war.

There are evidently only two alternative paths: One follows
the drumbeat of essentially lost leaders, marching us straight
off the cliff of non-existence; The other is the path of peace.
Nowhere do they cross; Nowhere do they meet.

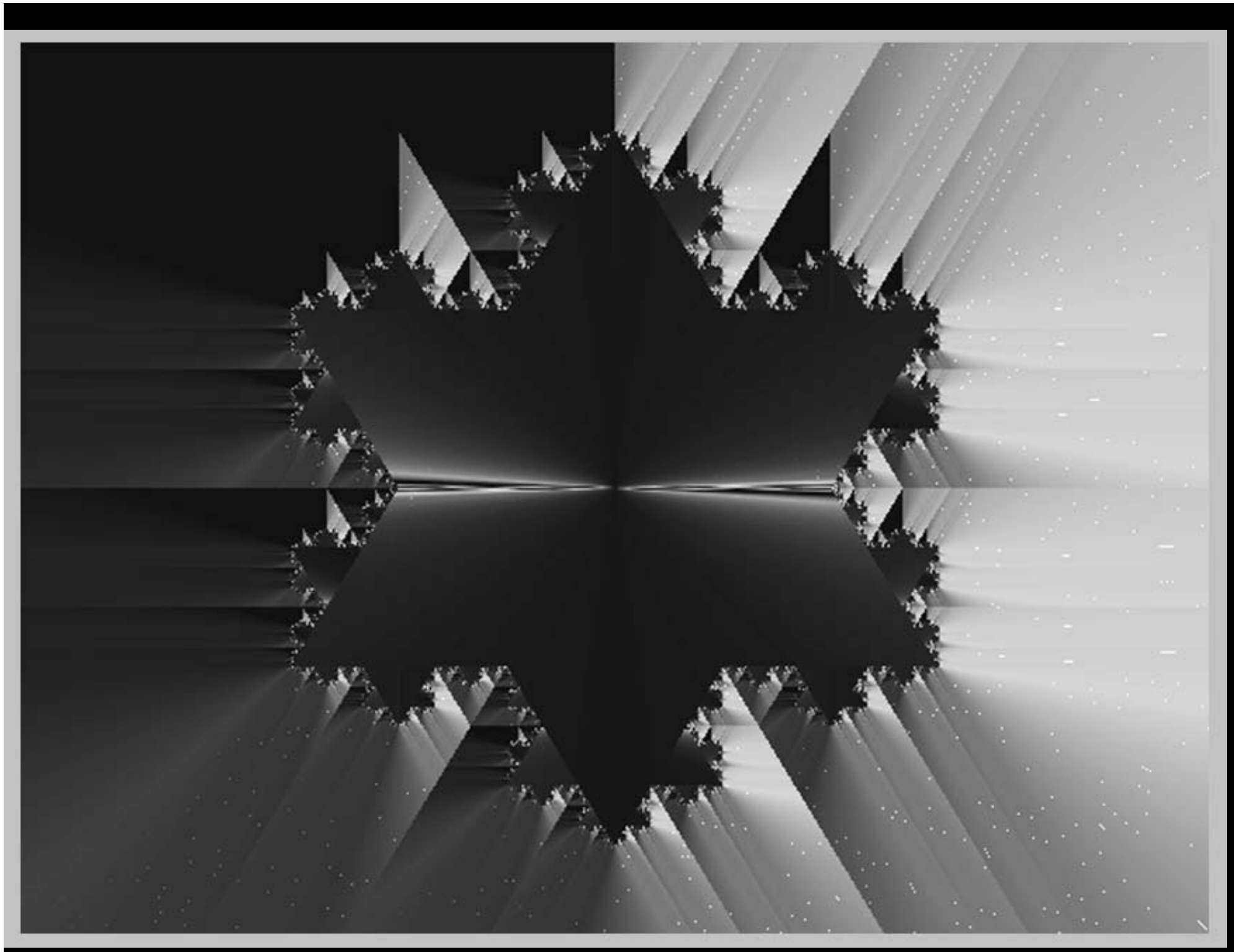
The great and historic challenge but also opportunity
before us, both individually and collectively, is the
demonstration in all possible directions—one at a time
and all at once—of the urgent necessity of this truth.

*Benchmark Camp,
Lakes Basin,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.30.2008*

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Koch Snowflake Flowform (generated with XoaS) . . . The *Koch Snowflake* was discovered in 1906 by Swedish mathematician, Niels von Koch. *"It begins with an equilateral triangle; three new equilateral triangles are constructed on each of its sides using the middle thirds as the bases, which are then removed to form a six-pointed star. This is continued in an infinite iterative process, so that the resulting curve has infinite length. The Koch snowflake is noteworthy in that it is continuous but nowhere differentiable; that is, at no point on the curve does there exist a tangent line."*
(Encyclopædia Britannica 2007)

THREE MINIATURES

(1) In limit, there is freedom; in freedom, there is limit.

Even the wildest of rivers creates itself the boundaries
of the bed that order its flow.

(2) New meaning necessitates new form.

After drinking from the source of a hundred mountain
streams, even the finest of wine glasses
may no longer suffice.

(3) Form emerges out of movement;

It is the outward envelope of the rhythmic pulse of change.

*"The Office,"
Richland, Oregon,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, X.15.2008*



Eagle Cap, Big Sky, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .



Hidden Lake, first light, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .



*Cloud Flowforms, coming from the West at 10:00 am, next day clear
& warm. Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .*



*Ron & Tommy, two South Wallowa friends, just returning with brothers
Frank & Clint Randall from a horeback trip up to Hidden Lake. Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .*



*Morning Coffee Camp at Family Simmons—Joni & Mark, with daughter Holly,
Hidden Lake, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .*



Black Elderberry at 1800 m., (*Sambucus racemosa* var. *melanocarpa*) My friend, David Landrum, expert field biologist from Corvallis with almost 30 years of experience working in mountain forests throughout the Northwest and my better in things botanical in every way, still owes me \$100 on a bet he lost on this species. *S. racemosa* in the Alps is indeed red, and inedible; this Wallowa variation, is *dark blue*, and edible. ***Sorry Dave! Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .***



Holly Lake, September Aspect, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .



Subalpine Fir forest along the meanders of Holly Brook , Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .



Hidden Lake, September Camp, morning light (7:15 am). In the Wallowas, east-facing high cirques make good campsites despite the cool nights, because they enjoy abundant early morning sunlight. Always a blessing. Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .



Streamside Fieldwork, East Eagle Valley , South Wallowas . . . Here
I'm working alongside the East Fork of Eagle Creek at one of my lower summer
basecamps, just below 5000 feet or so. I pack out of the roadless Eagle Cap Wilderness

area, process texts and photos, then bike out about 50 k to either Richland or Halfway, or a longer rider of 80 k to Baker City, all along the old gravel stagecoach gold route. Access to the South Wallowas is much more demanding than the North near Joseph or Enterprise. At the same time, there is much less traffic of any kind, whether hiker, horseback riders, or motorized vehicles. I've never once seen anyone else on a bike, and that despite the fact that the area is ring-wormed with old logging and mining roads that make for excellent mountain biking.



Metolius—
Water. Water. Water.



9-bark in Riparian



New Leaves—
unfolding

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FIELDWORK on Cornucopia Peak, Looking for Gold! (no luck...) (± 8600 feet)

View over Pine Valley & the community of Halfway . . .

On the road in the American Northwest.

FOOL'S PROSPECT—
to the reader . . .

O dear reader, please, you decide . . .

How ought I best spend my days?

Should I be out digging in dark loam for new poems,
or would I be better off looking for tiny specks of gold?

O, how I envy the industrious ant, dragging past me
the dead carcass of another species
very much larger than itself.

What booty! What satisfaction
at work well done!

No doubt, no hesitation there!

Yet here I sit, as I scribble and scratch away
at works fated—when the graces are with me
—to be beautiful, yet so sadly ignored.

And then, as my pan comes up empty again,
with nothing to show for my work today
but cold hands and a sore back,
slowly, I learn to see that all that sounds
right and good on my composing tablet may,

once tested by the Muse's unforgiving hammer of truth,
be but so much more shiny, attractive—
but o-so-easily fractured—
fool's prospect.

*Camp Lost & Found,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.1.2008*



Metolius—
Water. Water. Water.

CLIFF CREGO

3 = 46 = 58 = 73 = 92 = 46 = 55 = 65 = 77

solo violin *mf*

3 = 46 = 58 = 73 = 92

5 = 46 = 55 = 65 = 77

7 = 46 = 55 = 65 = 77

9 = 46 = 55 = 65 = 77 *138 (constant)* *sempre simile*

ppp *mf* *subito*

13

19

24

29 = 92 (constant 16ths) *f*

32 = 73 = 58 = 46

A Meditation on the Cult of Complication, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .

ON THE CULT OF COMPLICATION— *a rant in search of a key . . .*

The contemporary worship of complication mistakes the contortions of the intellect wrapping round itself for the mystery of the new and unknown. The worship of complication, or the deliberately difficult and obscure, is cultivated and consumed by a style of thinking that has completely lost its resonance with the natural world.

The cult of complication is like the obsessive figuring of a mind caught up in the random zig-zag noise of 12-tone melodies biting at my ears like hordes of hungry horseflies in a hot, unbearably dry afternoon sun, or in the degenerative chaos of money markets before they surge like drug-induced erections and then just as suddenly and precipitously collapse.

I say to you, the energy that we sense when we spontaneously encounter the new and unknown is an altogether different order of movement. It instantly aligns, challenges, and speaks to our whole being, like the firebolt of attraction we experience when unexpectedly encountering an attractive stranger's face. Or when I'm struck dumb by Rilke's magic wand of cascading sound images as it releases a flood of insight and emotion within me. Or when I hear that one Mozart violin sonata in a minor key that I must learn by heart and arrange. Or when I stand before the hurricane of sound of a Varèse that sweeps away in a heartbeat all the piles of accumulated contemporary rubbish with one true call of a solitary trumpet, or roar of a contrabass-trombone. That, Sirs, is the miracle of the new. Like the northface of an unclimbed mountain, it is simply there, pristine, pure and utterly indifferent to the confused chatter of our clever and oh-so-petty coffeehouse reviews.

*Hidden Lake,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.5.2008*

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Marker Stonepine—Whitebark Pine, dying (*Pinus albicaulis*) This is a color

& form to learn. The sad rusty-red of sick stonepines stands out on high slopes and ridges at a distance of more than 1000 meters. I use them as crosscountry guideposts, hence, the epithet "marker."

Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .

Whitebark Pines are in trouble around the mountains of the Northwest. For me, they have become a *sentinel species* because they are not only the grandest and, in my view, most powerful of pines to reach the upper limits of treeline—even in death the sun-bleached white snags stand tall for centuries—but also, like wounded watchful elders, the Nestors of the high-country, they are sounding a message of warning.

In the Alps, a related species of stonepine, *Pinus cembra*, is an object of much veneration and folklore. Just the act of an old mountain farmer saying its name in dialect, *Arve*, seems to fill him with a kind of primeval religious awe. Indeed, it has for hundreds of years been the favored wood for carving, and remarkably, for works of Art which show when seen within the traditional European cultural categories both sacred and profane aspects, ie., both crucifixes & 'wildman' masks for mountain carnival, *Fastnacht*.

I mention this only because I am repeatedly reminded that no similar tradition, as far as I know, exists in North America. Perhaps that is why only a handful of dedicated scientific researchers seem to be listening seriously to what the Whitebarks are saying, and not the culture at large. For as always—and this is sad to say, and is of course only my own opinion—North American culture is largely indifferent, is largely uninformed by the spirit of its great mountains.

Perhaps that is why I feel somehow compelled to mark in image and word as many of the sick stonepines as possible that I meet along the way.

| see also: [Whitebark Pines: *Endangered Sentinel*](#) for a collection of more images |

WHITEBARK PINE—8 *key ecological*

features (after Charles G. Johnson)

- (1) Of little commercial value for timber products.
- (2) Distribution and abundance of the species dependent on Clark's nutcracker for seed dispersal.
- (3) Fire resistant due to its severe site and scattered nature (fire discriminates against *subalpine firs* giving competitive advantage to the pine).
- (4) Fire control lengthens intervals between sanitizing burns resulting in fire-prone stands due to increases in fir composition.
- (5) Very susceptible to **white pine blister rust** and secondarily to **mountain pine beetle** after weakening by the rust.
- (6) Besides Clark's nutcracker, woodpeckers, chickadees, nuthatches, finches, crossbills, grosbeaks and blue grouse use the seeds. Squirrels, chipmunks and bears use the caches.
- (7) Blue grouse use needles and buds.
- (8) Greatest value of the tree is for watershed protection.

*data from Alpine and Subalpine Vegetation
of the Wallowa, Seven Devils and Blue Mountains*

By **Charles Grier Johnson Jr.**

2004 USDA- Forest Service Pacific Northwest Region

*Camp Lost & Found,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.15.2008*



Alpine Fleeceflower—close-up (Polygonum phytolaccaefolium)

Member of the Buckwheat family—notice the knot-like swellings

giving the clan its other somewhat less charming common name, Knotweed—after the first frost of highcountry autumn, the entire plant loses its moisture, becomes paper-like in texture, and then turns a stunning fiery orange to rusty red. With parboiling and stirfying, much like, say, Burdock, the finger-thick roots of Fleeceflower are not only edible but in my opinion a real delicacy. If there is one plant to know in the Wallows come fall, this is it!

Eagle Cap Wilderness ...

Here's is an autumn quartet of Alpine Fleeceflower images growing in diverse situations varying in altitude from about 2000 to 2400 m., and mostly seeming to prefer a granite (gray background!) substrate:



[Alpine
Fleeceflower
on
Granite](#)



[Fleeceflower
at Pop
Creek
Pass](#)



[Horsemen
Crossing
Fleeceflower
Meadow](#)



[Fleeceflower
At Glacier
Lake](#)

ON FREEDOM'S NECESSARY BALANCE

Freedom, it seems to me, is always a question of balance between *freedom to*, on the one hand, and *freedom from*, on the other.

I might feel that I should be free to mine for gold upstream from your homestead. You, in contrast, may feel equally strongly the right to be free from the danger of the cyanide from my leech ponds getting into your drinking water.

Clearly, the task of the rule of law is protect both freedoms,

carefully weighing the pros and cons in each case in an ongoing way. Balance between the two freedoms is not a fixed state, but more akin to keeping a bike upright as the rider shifts his or her weight, now to the left, now to the right away from the direction of the fall.

Notice, too, that freedom so balanced is always *ethical* freedom. That is, it is freedom that is necessarily mindful of the myriad potential negative consequences of actions undertaken by free agents as they reverberate throughout the wider community, or the human-plus-natural-environment, as a whole.

*Camp Lost & Found,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.15.2008*

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Alpine Fleeceflower at Glacier Lake (Polygonum phytolaccaefolium)

Member of the Buckwheat family—notice the knot-like swellings



Alpine Fleeceflower on Granite (*Polygonum phytolaccaefolium*)

Member of the Buckwheat family—notice the knot-like swellings





Horsemen Crossing Fleeceflower Meadow (Polygonum phytolaccaefolium)

Member of the Buckwheat family—notice the knot-like swellings

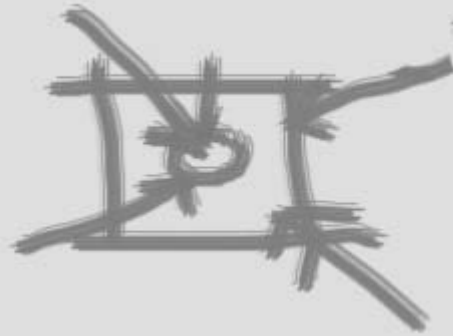


Rock-water Flowform, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .

ON TWO DESTRUCTIVE EXCEPTIONS TO NATURAL MOVEMENT

The natural web of life—or how a great diversity of species are knitted together in a weave of interdependencies—has deep roots in both space and time. Its strength is not just its resilience, but also its ability to quickly adapt to change. These changes may be small and hardly noticeable, or large-scale and catastrophic, but both are frequently initiated by what are essentially chance events. The responses, however, are anything but determined by chance, and are rather swift adaptations shaped by, in the view being sketched here, highly developed forms of natural intelligence. This complementary back and forth of *chance* and *necessity* results in a deeper formative ground which is remarkably free of waste and contradiction.

Now, two uniquely problematic forms of movement which are evidently not native to this web of life but which are characteristic of humans and the artifacts which they produce are: First, *the total absence of movement*, as for instance where toxic wastes accumulate in life-web environments as essentially dead, inert weights because of their inability to break down and thereby become reassimilated as new components of the natural cycle; Second, the other extreme is *exponential runaway growth*. This occurs, for example, when species which are not part of the life-web are for whatever reason introduced and then go on to fragment the fabric of interrelationships and dependencies. Because exponential runaway growth is clearly growth which, as we say, is *out of control*, it contradicts what I see as the universal principle of natural limit.



the total absence of movement



exponential runaway growth

***TWO EXTREME FORMS OF DESTRUCTIVE,
NON-NATURAL MOVEMENT***

It is evidently because both extremes violate the natural order of movement that they are potentially so destructive. They both place themselves, so to speak, *outside* of natural movement by either *refusing* to move, as in the case of the toxin that will not budge, or by *refusing to stop moving*, as in the case of exponential runaway growth of, for example, some weeds. One could say that both sides of this refusal defy the central ordering principle of limit, which in turn is both the complementary side of freedom and a key feature of the dynamic balance of all self-sustaining natural cycles.

One expansion of this idea into the realm of finance that I'll

explore in another miniature is how the mathematics of compound interest results in equally destructive cultural movements: one grinding the debt of the already poor into an absolute insoluble toxic standstill; the other running away exponentially with more and more wealth going to the already wealthy, seemingly without end or limit. Remarkably, in an almost identical way to natural systems, this imbalance must necessarily lead to total collapse. And also remarkably, the key missing concept or feature is again simply limit. A balanced, free economy, in my view, must of necessity be a strictly limited one. Just like an essentially self-organizing network of streaming pathways—either for cars or for digital data, it makes no difference—there must be a small, explicit, unambiguous set of clear rules for what is *not* allowed: not faster than, not on that side of the road, turn here, stop there, etc. In an economy, these speed limits on wealth would instantly insure a vastly more equitable distribution of essential resources among all the peoples of the world community. Like Gandhi famously said: "*The Earth provides enough for man's need, but not for his greed.*" We would do well, I think, to redesign our cultural systems to conform organically to the demonstrably more creative intelligence of the natural world by taking this fundamental insight as our basic point of departure.

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*Moonrise Over Red Mountain / (White) Granite Mountain, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .
View East from Muir Lake, IX.12.2008 ('Crater Lake'...)*

Mountains & Meaning

What mountains mean to us in many unconscious, tacit, yet powerful ways conditions or forms our attitudes towards them, as well as our own behavior once we have entered them. Yet, the metaphysics of mountains, in my view, suffers tremendously from outmoded stereotypes, which may or may not be partially true—like monks in meditation in the high plains of Tibet (now being replaced by Chinese machine guns), or Cowboys and Indians fighting it out in the rugged canyons and highlands of the American West—but they greatly impede the discovering of new and more currently appropriate ways of seeing and being.

Mountains have, after-all—just as the North and South poles of the planet—become ground zero for the effects of climate chaos. So any disaster already unfolding down in the lowlands one can easily amplify by at least a factor of two once we enter the land above the trees. Glaciers are disappearing at a very much faster pace than any expert I know of had predicted until very recently. Permafrost is melting. Artifacts in the Alps, a range I for personal reasons feel very close to, are coming out of the melting ice around the Schnidejoch between Wallis and Berner Oberland which are more than six thousand years old. The great Whitebark Pines, some of the oldest trees in the American Northwest, are becoming what I think of as the polar bear of trees because they are literally being forced off the planet, off the tops of mountains. As temperatures rise just one or two degrees c., the Whitebarks are falling prey to mountain pine beetle infestations against which they have never evolved defenses.

So what do mountains mean to me? Well, obviously, many things. What comes immediately to mind is Emerson's saying, *"Poetry is saying the most important things in the simplest possible of ways."* That, it seems to me, is what the mountains are saying to us. The most important things, in the very simplest of ways. The way a river begins out of nowhere by bubbling up from the ground as a trickle of pure, crystalline spring water.

Or a genus of plants like the Buckwheats miraculously and artfully adapts to the wind and cold as each species progressively becomes lower and more compact the higher it grows. Or the graceful, almost timeless meanders of an alpine boggy brook, full of healthy lightning fast fingerlings, going so against the grain of the straight-line concrete roads and channels of present Western culture. Or the wonderful symbiosis—a kind of *living together art-form*—of the Nutcracker and Whitebark Pine, the tree providing nutritious nuts for the bird, the bird playing the role of haphazard gardner for the tree as it caches hundreds of nuts, many of which it forgets and that then go onto sprout and become new stonepine seedlings.

This is the stuff not just poems are made of, but also myth and fairy-tale. And yet, where are the children? Nowhere in the Northwest, nowhere in the Wallowa wilderness have I seen children under 12 years of age. I think instantly of Sacajawea of the great Lewis & Clark Corps of Discovery carrying her little infant Jean-Pierre safely and with an utterly amazing self-confidence—truly a great gift of her Shoshone culture—from present day North Dakota to the Oregon coast and back again. Climb Everest? Well, yes, perhaps. But in my book, let some young intrepid mother / alpinist repeat or better that remarkable feat.

So what do the mountains mean to us? Evidently, not a place to teach the young—to let them learn for themselves—the most important things, in the simplest possible of ways. This must change. And I am confident it will change once we resolutely turn to face the Sun, and abandoned the failure of the culture of oil, war and waste.

Imagine sitting around the fire-ring at night and looking out on the moonrise pictured above. How would you open up the eyes of a child to the scene? I would say: *"You see that red earth mountain on the left? And look at that mountain almost as white as snow on the right! Do you see how the Moon is rising right where the two mountains join hands? That's the Moon's way of blessing them both. That's the Moon's way of telling the 'red' Native American peoples and the 'white' European-American peoples that they need to make spiritual peace for all the bad things that happened in the past. Pretty, isn't it?"*

Let me sound out this little meditation with a childlike miniature in the manner of Emily Dickinson:

I lost my spirit the other day.
It was nothing I had read,
Or anything I had done or said,
It was something
I did not,
could not, say.
The mountains made it stay.

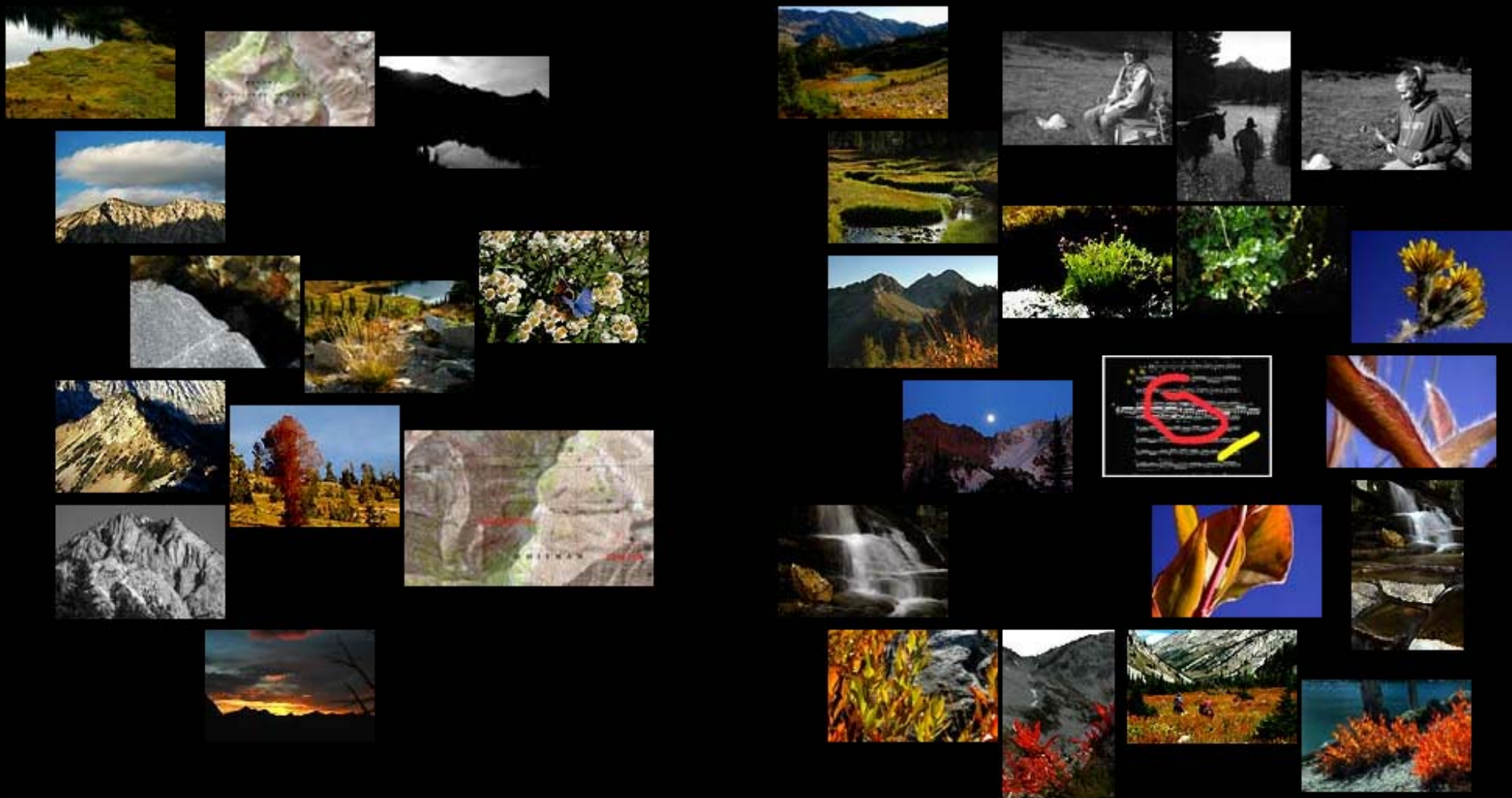
*Muir Lake,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.12.2008*

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September 2008: [Each week has two lead photos—*top left & right*; and two groups of four secondary photos, which in turn may branch out by theme. Click on an image, and the title bar will give *place & date*. Look below image for more info, miniatures, poems, links, etc. To view the more compact **Lead Photo Archives**, click [here](#)]



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Photoweb Northwest X.17.2008

24 new images & texts

made in the autumn

High Wallows—

by Cliff Crego



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Snowy Passage, North / South crossing over Horton Pass, Eagle Cap Wilderness

October is the month that the Wallowas change from

the outward-bound energy of bright major keys and
shining granites of every description, to the darker
keys of minor and moody, unpredictable skies.

One can have nine days of spectacularly clear skies.
And then get slammed by a sudden cold front.

One can have a couple feet of snow. And then watch warm
chinook winds melt it all in a day.

For me, it's the time when the poet tunes his or her lyre
of peace to the phrygian of minor, with the half-step
of the sadness of sadness so close, so proud, so full
of resistance, but always ultimately giving itself
back to the fundamental, the ground, the Earth.

It is a time of moons as big as hope itself, and
springs that run so cold and clear they resemble
flowing icy quartz crystals.

And yet, how strange, how strange, I say to myself over
and over again. There is no one there. There is no one
there.

EPITHETS OF A SPECIES

—for David Landrum

Miraculous. Mischievous. Miserable.

Epithets of a species placed
in the order of your choice.

Mischievous. Miraculous. Miserable.

Born naked into a web of dependencies
in a harsh, brutal, indifferent world.

Miserable. Mischievous. Miraculous.

Instrument of the mind, a compassionate
intelligence of infinite subtlety that mirrors
both itself and the whole.

Miraculous. Miserable. Mischievous.

Sole life-form that till the end of time
must walk the sharp knife-edge of its
own self-destruction.

Miserable. Mischievous. Miraculous.

The choice of epithets is our own.

*Broken Bridge Camp,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, X.29.2008*



[Stonebreak](#)
[Flowforms](#)



Streamside
Fieldwork—
VII.30.08



Alpine
Geometry



Fireweek—
flower form



Thimble
Berry
Leaf



Moon Lake—
Mirrors of Light &
Sound



[Upper Lake](#)
[&](#)
[Three Miniatures](#)



[Holly Brook](#)
[3-step](#)



[Quaking Aspen](#)
[Leaves](#)



[Glacier Polish—](#)
[niche erratics](#)



[Mandelbrot Fractal V](#)
[&](#)
[LOVE IS ROUND](#)



[Right of the](#)
[Line!](#)



Stonebreak Flowforms, Pine Lakes, Eagle Cap Wilderness
On the road in the American Northwest.

THE POOL OF LIFE

—a prose poem meditation

The bite of a trout breaks the surface of the water's morning calm . . .

Small fish are protected by their lightning-fast speed;
Large, by their greater weight and water-wise ways.
But neither is safe from the folly of the farmer's banker as he in his thirst unquenchable taps off the last drops of the pool's water.

O round pool of an alpine tarn, waves resonating,
ringing out into the distance. Who is to say where they stop? See the subtle society of their merging, their complex composite forms.

Some cultures just rush right by, so full of fear are they that the banker will lock his doors forever before they can make a final run on their cash. Others, give the reading of such waves their complete and utmost attention, protecting the quiet waters upon which they are composed from interferences undue.

As the autumn morning shades into afternoon, a lone golden eagle turns wide, soaring circles above the pond, first sun-wise, then widershens. I lay back on the soft heather tundra and remember images from the past. "*Sempre solo, tutti cresti!*" says the proud Italian mountain farmer. Not far away, a man came out of the time-warp of glacier ice, Ötzi, more than five thousand years old, with boots—see the miracle!—made of four different kinds of leather and a layer of matted straw for warmth.

Who is to say . . . Out of the ice . . .

Perhaps that is all we are. Just patterns of waves, and mostly water.

Broken Bridge Camp,

Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, X.29.2008



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(created: **XI.10.2008**)



*Alpine Geometry, Muir Lake (Crater Lake), VII.22.08 evening, looking Southeast,
Eagle Cap Wilderness . . . On the road in the American Northwest.*

WEATHER IN THE WEST

3 months of hot as hell,
3 months of cold as hell,
and 3 months of *lord-knows-what*
in between.

ALPINE GEOMETRY

Horizontal lines of water,
vertical lines of trees,
everything else *fractals*
in between.

*Broken Bridge Camp,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, X.29.2008*



Fireweed Flower Forms, (Epilobium angustifolium, a member of the Evening Primrose family, and a circumpolar species of great beauty) Eagle Cap Wilderness
On the road in the American Northwest.

THREE METAPHYSICAL MINIATURES

(I)

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

To love the plants is to know them. To know plants is to make them your friend. To make plants your friend is to greatly expand the happy circumference of the circle of your community. The child who grows up safe, protected and able to learn within such a circle of plant-friends will receive the gift of a wonderfully enriched and lasting notion of home.

(II)

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

Just as no one ever wanted to cloud the skies with the smoky haze of accumulated car exhaust, or wanted streams to run muddy with human waste, no one ever intended the world to become a noisy place. But noisy it is, all the same.

And, now that noise has become a part of practically every landscape—even the most isolated and highest mountain ranges have jets roaring above them—how shall we ever know what the deeper, more subtle effects of noise really are? On the human psyche? Or on Nature as a whole? For the question has in a way become: where are the control groups to be found? And where is there by now even a single researcher to be had who has not been to some extent profoundly conditioned—even while still in the womb—by a sea of surrounding noise?

I wouldn't pretend to know, but my guess is that noise works on the mind something like a contracting air-tight

room. As the noise levels increase, the walls of the room close in and the pressure builds. Finally, one finds one's face pushed up against the wall, until one can no longer hear oneself talk, or even think. An ur-scream of almost unbearable angst would almost certainly be the result. Remarkably, no one designed this environment, or intended this to happen. It just did.

I sometimes ask myself what would be the composite sound if we were all to cry out like this together, at the same time? We may soon find out.

III)

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

Every habit quickly becomes its own formative cause. And there's nothing more habit-forming than getting something for nothing: plunder of war, slavery, compound interest, theft. Who will be the first to demonstrate the simplicity and power of a new ethics, where work is exchanged equitably for work, and time is exchanged in equal measure for time, and no one has the right ethically to more land than to meet his or her family's, or collective or community of friend's, needs?

*Pine Lakes Camp,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, X.28.2008*



Thimble Berry Leaf, October aspect, (Rubus parviflorus, member of the Rose family)
Eagle Cap Wilderness

LEAVES

A single maple leaf
falls upon my page,
marking the passage
of this most liminal of seasons.
Sharp north wind
rising high above the sound
of cold rushing water,
scattering yesterday's hopes
of where I'd be today, and today's
thoughts of where I'd
be tomorrow.

CONSERVATION

Conservation is a way of dealing with Nature's fundamental asymmetry: that growth is *slow*, and destruction *fast*.

CULTURE OF CHAIRS?

The first person to come up with a chair had back-pain.
Then he gave it to the rest of us!

MUSIC?

Music? The one thing humans do that makes
the rest of Nature jealous.

*Broken Bridge Camp,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, X.29.2008*

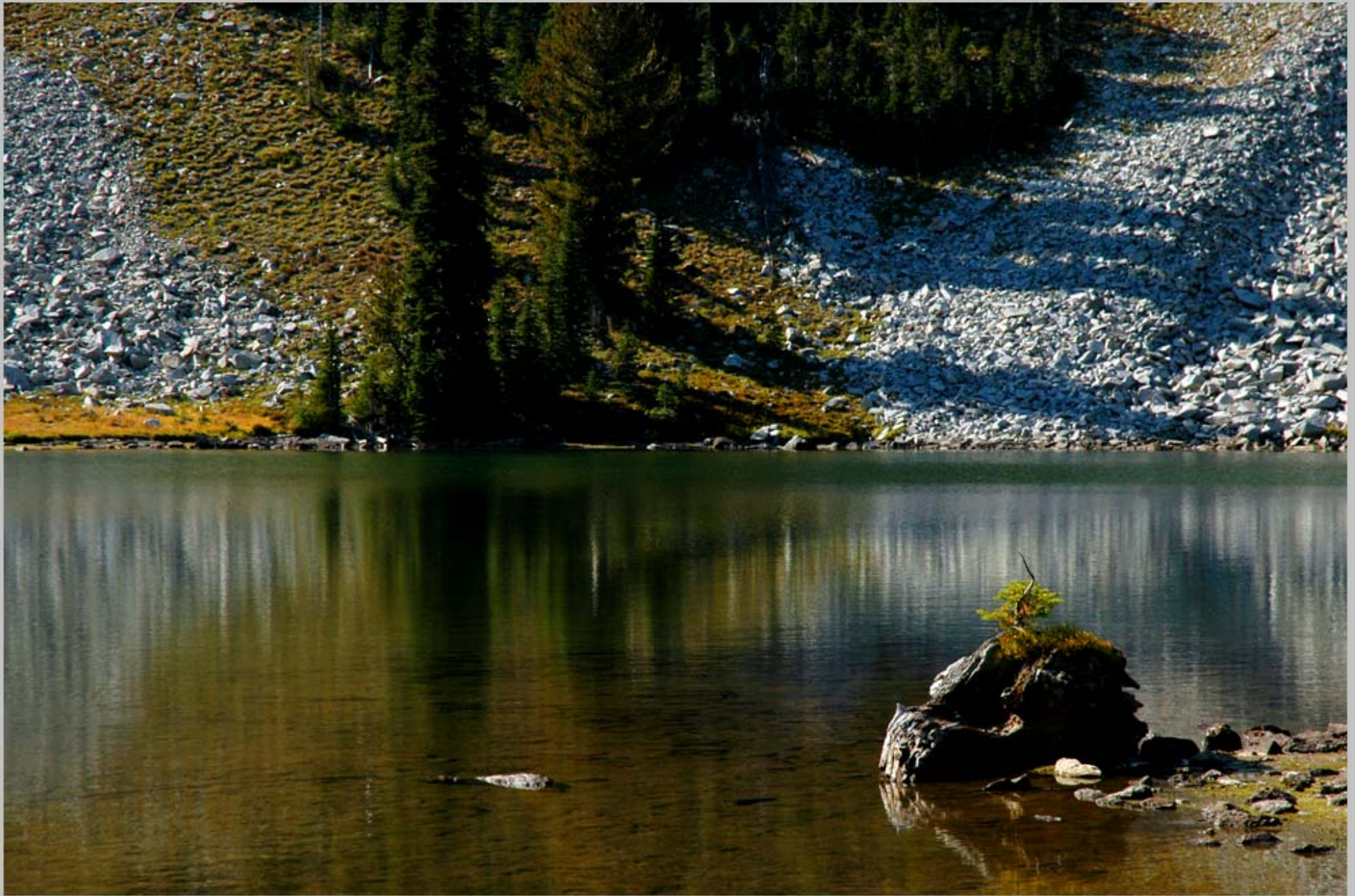


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Moon Lake, end of September afternoon . . . Eagle Cap Wilderness
On the road in the American Northwest.

Here is a little set of three 37-step poems which plays with the theme of mirrors, of reflection not just of light, but also of sound. In order for a variation form like this to really flower, one needs to do them in sets or sequences. Try reading them out-loud to get a sense of how the rhythms and accents change in surprising ways while still keeping to the basic 37-step pattern:

Mirrors of Light & Sound

(I)

High walls of contrast,
flat surface of an alpine lake, giv-
ing back the wind and clouds and moon

and distant

stars. Mind of Earth, eye
that rejects none, and accepts all.

(II)

Flat, even surface
of neutrality, water re-
flects, receives both a god's self-love,

and the thoughts

of humble fishes
caught in the swirl of a moth's wings.

(III)

Mirrors made of sound,
piano-forte of the mind,
sets of strings tuned to resonate

with the voice

of Love's sympathy.
O sound of the soul, eternal.

*Pine Lakes Camp,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, X.29.2008*

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Upper Lake, on the way to Horton Pass, main North / South axis . . . Eagle Cap Wilderness
On the road in the American Northwest.

FIVE METAPHYSICAL MINIATURES

(I)

Symbols refer to meaning as currency refers to value:—only in a highly abstract and intellectual way. The danger with such abstraction is that it tends to wander off on its own, losing its basis in actual fact.

Eventually, symbols may refer only to other symbols, meaning then becoming merely a systemic property inferred from the symbols themselves;

Likewise, value may no longer be grounded in natural richness, but simply in more currency itself.

Before we realize it, it will seem logical to say that life began with a bang, and markets must end with:—a crash.

(II)

Money? A movement which always seems to be going in the wrong direction.

(III)

Chance *proposes*; Intelligence *disposes*.
No one can predict which flower the butterfly will pass by next.

(IV)

Simplicity? In *Politics*, the most radical idea is simplicity; In *Art*, the most difficult idea is simplicity; In *Science*, the most necessary idea

is simplicity; In *Religion*, the most mysterious,
arduous, complex idea, is simplicity.

(V)

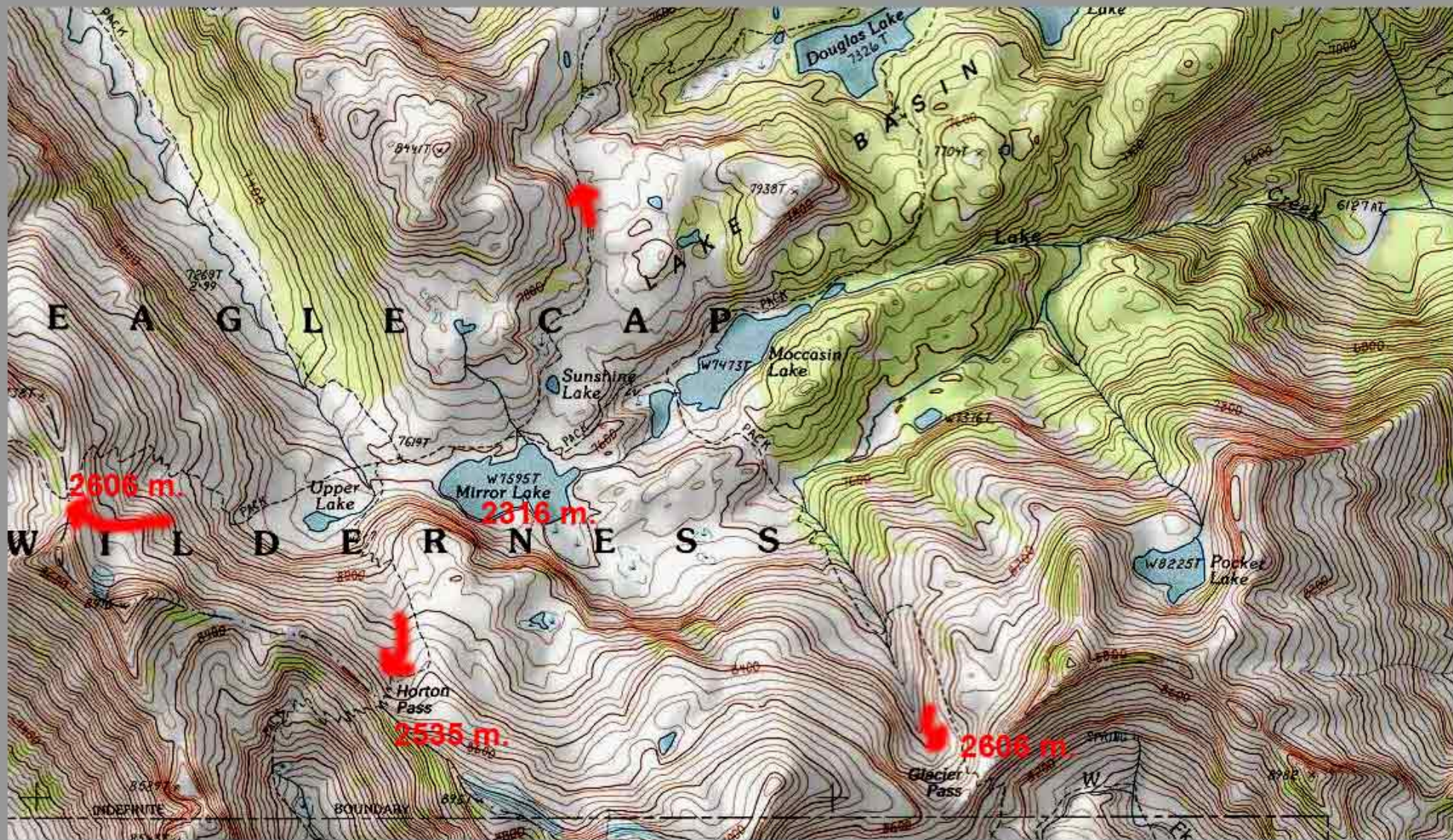
How complicated the ways we wander
once Truth is lost;

How needless the wars,
how without meaning the waste.

from **100 MINIATURES**



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TOPO Lakes Basin, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .
On the road in the Northwest of America.

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Holly Brook 3-step, Eagle Cap Wilderness
On the road in the American Northwest.

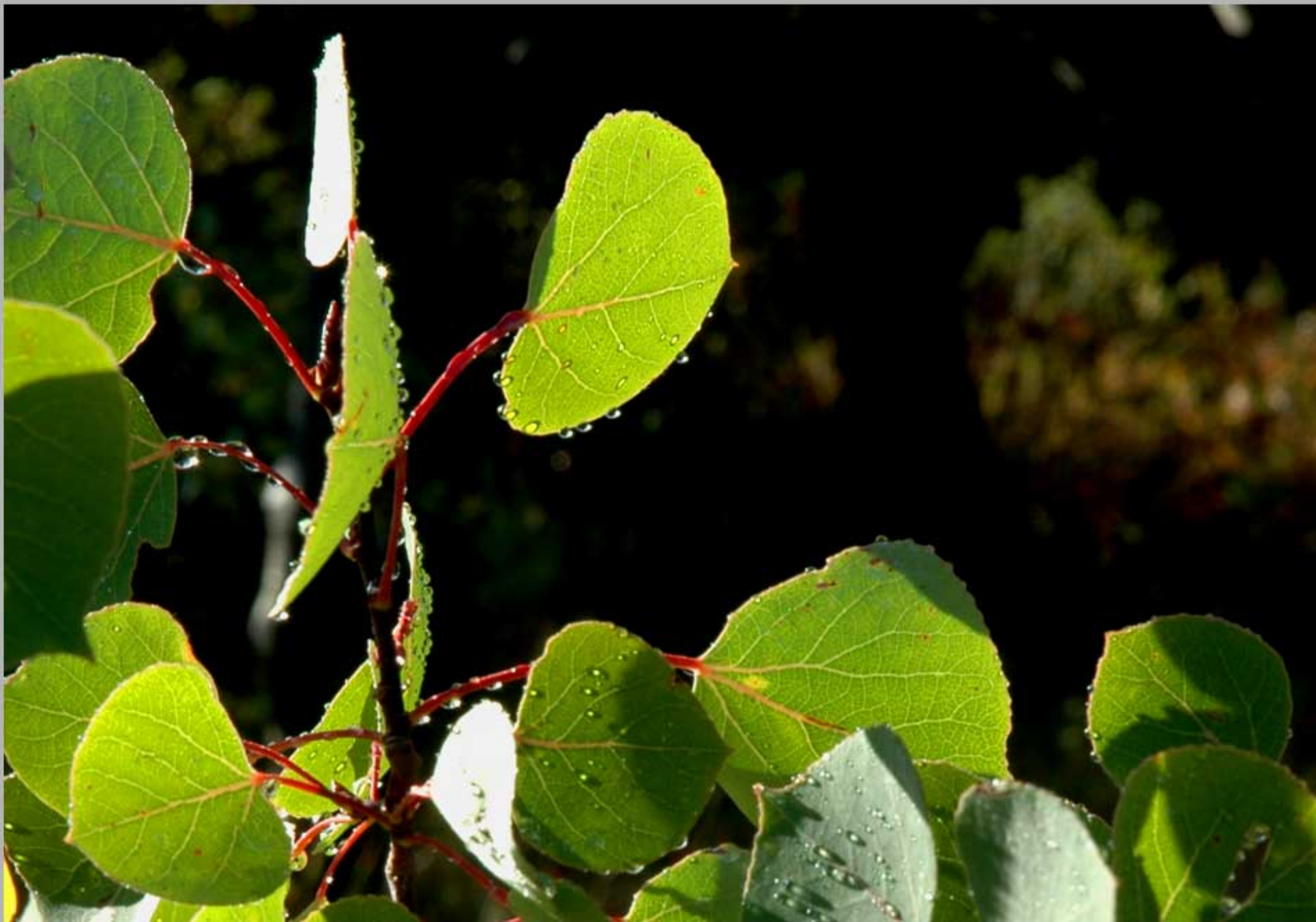
ON THE MASCULINE ENERGY OF CONTROL

There's something about the decidedly masculine energy of control that loves the crisp, clear, straight lines of a bullet's trajectory. Think of it:—straight walls, straight pipes, straight roads.

Pity the time when women no longer cry out that life is not only a matter of the shortest, most efficient route between points *a* and *b*, but that there is more, that life is from another perspective essentially round. And that time is not just an arrow flying fast and furious to its ultimate end, but also a mysterious rhythmic pulse of wheels within wheels within wheels that comes round with the miracle of each new birth.

Pity the time when women acquiesce in their silence and become at once both sad imitators and tragic victims of this one-sided, extraordinarily powerful, but oh-so-incomplete straight-line universe of men.

*Broken Bridge Camp,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, X.29.2008*



Quaking Aspen Leaves . . . (Populus tremuloides, most widely distributed tree of North America.) On the road in the American Northwest.

THE ASPEN OF FORGETFULNESS

Some things we wish to remember; others, we'd rather forget. The latter we'd prefer to see turn yellow and dry, withering away till they fall like autumn leaves to the ground, feeding the fertile humus of some common past under our feet.

Descending a steep southern slope, I stop to rest a while under an old doug-fir. The late-summer draw is dry, but still full of the lush green of quaking aspens.

Heart-shaped leaves on long, slender stems, some say the most beautifully proportioned leaf of all deciduous trees, their blades now quivering in the gentle afternoon wind like the soft skin of a young woman first falling in love.

The sound of the leaves glistens with light-filled silences between the green blades, the shape of the whole coming in slow, easy waves that seem to say in a receding, ever-softer echoing, "*Let it go. Let it go. Let it go.*"

I look for a pen to write something down, which I can't find, and then look at the new blank page I had ready. This I fold up and put back into my pocket, as I shoulder my pack, stand and start walking again down the hill, happy to have rested a while among aspen and fir, and forgetting about all those things in the past that now seem continents away, that I really didn't intend to, didn't want to, really didn't need to say.

*Camp Lost & Found,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, VIII.17.2008*



Glacier Polish, niche erratics, Eagle Cap Wilderness
On the road in the American Northwest.

WAR MEM DEAD

*—for Dickevicki,
Vietnam Vet, lover of poetry, and friend
on many of the happy backroads
of my Berkeley days*

Imagine two flocks of white doves released
at a ceremony's end up into the bright morning air, but that
they remain by some tragic mistake tethered to the ground.
The birds fly up to the heavens, but fall just as quickly back to
the earth in a sudden tug of violence. Yet all present,
because of their own grief, their own great personal loss,
seem utterly unaware of this terrible suffering of the doves.
Just so, at the end of this wall, remain two questions which
the heart releases, and which flutter helplessly about in need
of some resolution, some serious, believable, answer:
Where are the other names,
the names we cannot pronounce,
the names that would have increased
the wall's already temendous, horrible length
at least five-fold?
And will this be the last such wall,
the last such war,
or shall we repeat again, and then again, the same

wholly unnecessary, brutal, mistake

of making more of such wars,

and of such walls?

At the end of the wall remain two questions, questions

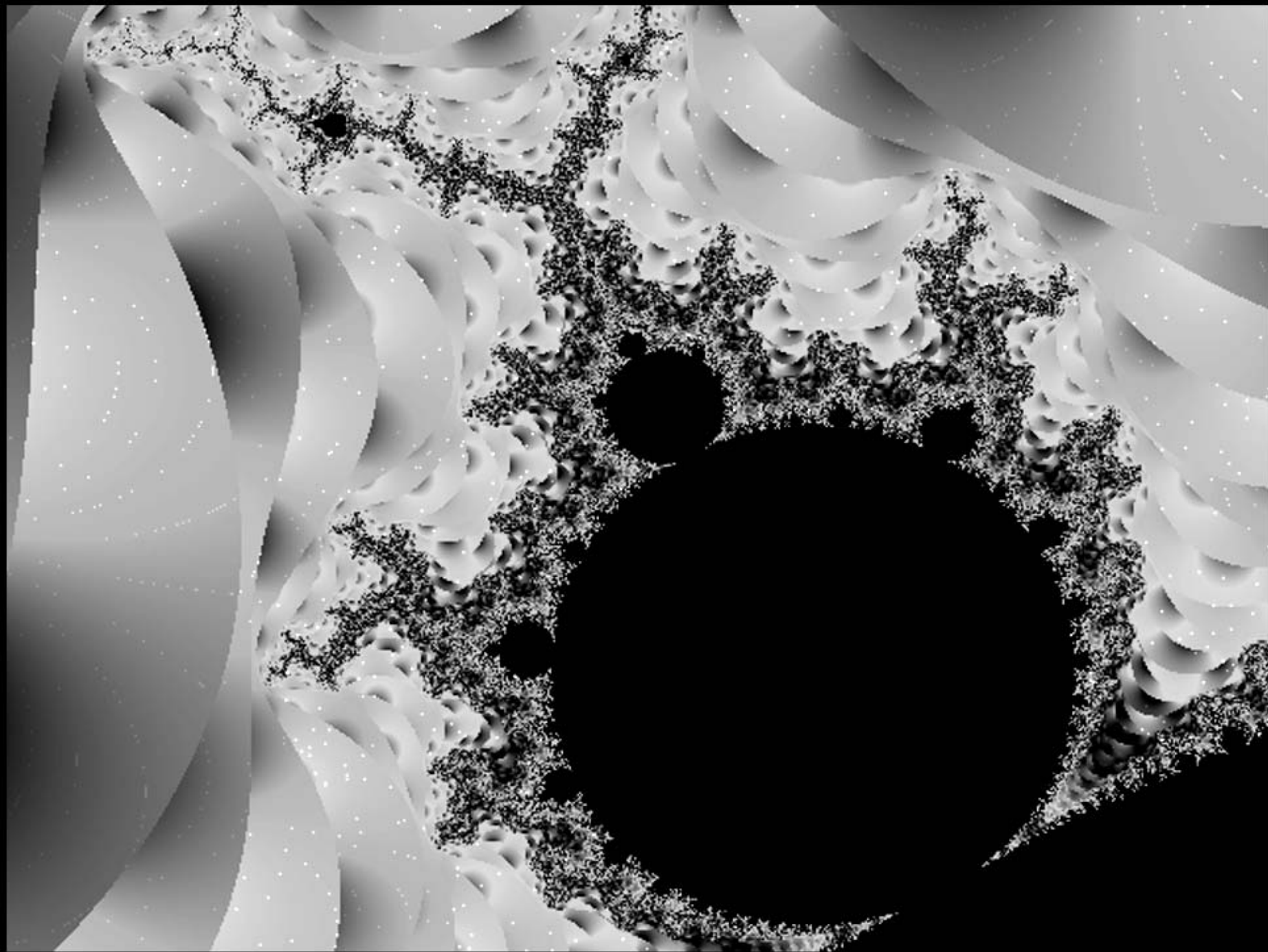
a child might ask that the heart releases, and which flutter

about in need of some resolution, some serious, believable,

answer.

*Broken Bridge Camp,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, X.29.2008*

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Mandelbrot Fractal V, generated with XaoS . . .
On the road in the American Northwest.

LOVE IS ROUND

Love wants to come round.

The performer who must sing

in a space without echoes

quickly cancels

future

engagements.

HABIT OF PHOTOGRAPHY

When all the world

begins to look

like a photograph,

it is time

to put the cameras

away.



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RIGHT OF THE LINE! biking from Bend to Burns on Hwy. 20

While biking down straight road to infinity like this one,
I often remember and recite certain of my Miniatures, like

"A free economy is a strictly limited one.
Even the busiest of thoroughfares still retains
a thin white line, protecting the rights of those
of us who prefer to walk." (or bike, as is here the case...)

OUT OF CONTROL—*the runaway economies of systemic imbalance*

I have argued elsewhere, that all truly free economies are necessarily strictly limited ones. This goes, of course, radically against the prevailing metaphysics that freedom increases with the decrease of regulation. Let's see why.

The model I like to use is that of an essentially self-regulating, self-organizing network of highways. The point I like to make is that systems of roads function as well as they do because they are ordered not on *principles of control*—that is, rules that tell you *what* to do—but rather on *principles of limit*—that is, rules that tell you *what not* to do, like no faster or slower than x.

My contention is that a small set of clear, unambiguous rules or limits is a hallmark of all self-organizing systems. (A rule of thumb—with no play on words intended—is that, if you have more limits than fingers on one hand, something is wrong. One ought always be able to tick off the rules quickly and rhythmically as a test of clarity.) What do I mean by self-organizing? Well, in human terms, the key feature of self-organization is that it requires little or no policing. In other words, the system exhibits natural in-built safeguards against, and correction of, all breaking of limits. I don't want to crash into *you*, and you don't want to crash into *me*, so we naturally both readily accept all such reasonable limits.

Another way of saying the same thing negatively is: a self-organizing system has failed, that is, has demonstrated an inappropriate or ill-designed set of limits, when it is in need of continuous control *by use of force*. The key point I would like to make here, is that this is a systemic problem, and not an ethical one concerning a few individuals of questionable moral character. For example, in my view, current US drug

laws are a textbook illustration of such failure, causing far more suffering and disorder than they eliminate, both on the streets of North American cities and in the developing countries where source plants like poppies and coca are grown. (Even conservative economist Milton Friedman thought this to be the case.) So, excessive use of force by the State in democratic countries is, in the view being sketched here, a plain indication that somewhere in the background of an arcane legal system lurks a poorly conceived, self-defeating labyrinth of unjust laws and self-serving legislation.

So, what would a clear set of self-organizing limits for a free economy look like? In this miniature, I'm not going to answer this question directly. Rather, I'd like to state by way of two examples drawn from current financial headlines what a truly free—and therefore strictly limited—economy would *not* look like.

In 1999, the Clinton administration repealed a key depression era piece of legislation known as the *Glass-Steagall Act*. This act was designed to keep—in other words, to limit—savings and speculative investment banks separate. Repealing the act removed the limits, thus effectively giving government sanction for bankers of all stripes to imprudently throw the dice, so to speak, with the money in our savings accounts.

A second crucial misstep occurred in 2004 when under the Bush administration, then chairperson of Goldman Sachs and now Secretary of the Treasury, Hank Paulson, convinced the Securities and Exchange Commission to lift limits on required investment capital.* This led to the remarkable situation that, when Bear Stearns went under, they were leveraging, to use an ugly phrase, 33 dollars of debt on every dollar of equity, to use another equally cumbersome expression. In other words, the 1930's depression era saying, "*A dime will get you a dollar*," had become under Secretary Paulson's influence, "*Three cents will get you a dollar!*"

Now, to continue with our analogy of a self-organizing and self-regulating network of highways, the repeal of Glass-Steagall and allowing the savings and investment branches of the banking system to merge, is the roadway equivalent of allowing **NASCAR** to run races freely on the Interstate. And to add insult to injury, the 2004 repeal of capital limits is the equivalent of giving the fastest and most high-powered of those race-cars a loan of essentially free gas (3 cents on the dollar..) The result

has been, as everyone now knows, catastrophic. The collapse, in my view, while not perhaps in all its on-going gory details, but rather in its general outline, was completely predictable. And what is more, it is not the mere result of the greed of 'a few bad apples,' but I would argue of systemic poor design. That is, the utter failure to compose a clear set of unambiguous limits. Again, just as is already universally the case with networks of roads around the world.

My central point, however, does not concern the details of reform that would lead to less corruption and a more equitable distribution of wealth and access to resources, but rather one of basic logical necessity. Most readers are probably already aware, that, in the recent US election cycle, Mr. McCain received about seven million dollars in backing from Wall Street; While Mr. Obama received about 10 million. My contention is that, as long as it is possible to purchase influence in this way, and on this scale, the economy must necessarily be skewed to the expensive racecars of the already reckless hyper-rich, resulting in a continuous cascade of unnecessary and unpredictable pile-ups and crashes. And, if we fail to take heed of this basic difference between, on the one hand, intelligent limit, and on the other, rigid mechanical control or regulation, then we had better prepare ourselves for more self-induced world-wide economic runaways charging headlong into degenerative chaos. As Virgil has it in his arresting image of his Georgics: *"The world is like a chariot run wild, that rounds the course unchecked, and, gaining speed, sweeps the helpless driver onto his doom."*

*Pine Lakes Camp,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, X.29.2008*

* data drawn from an excellent [Democracy Now!](#) interview ([X.17.2008](#)) with **Paul Craig Roberts**, former Assistant Secretary of the Treasury Department in the Reagan administration and a former associate editor of the Wall Street Journal.

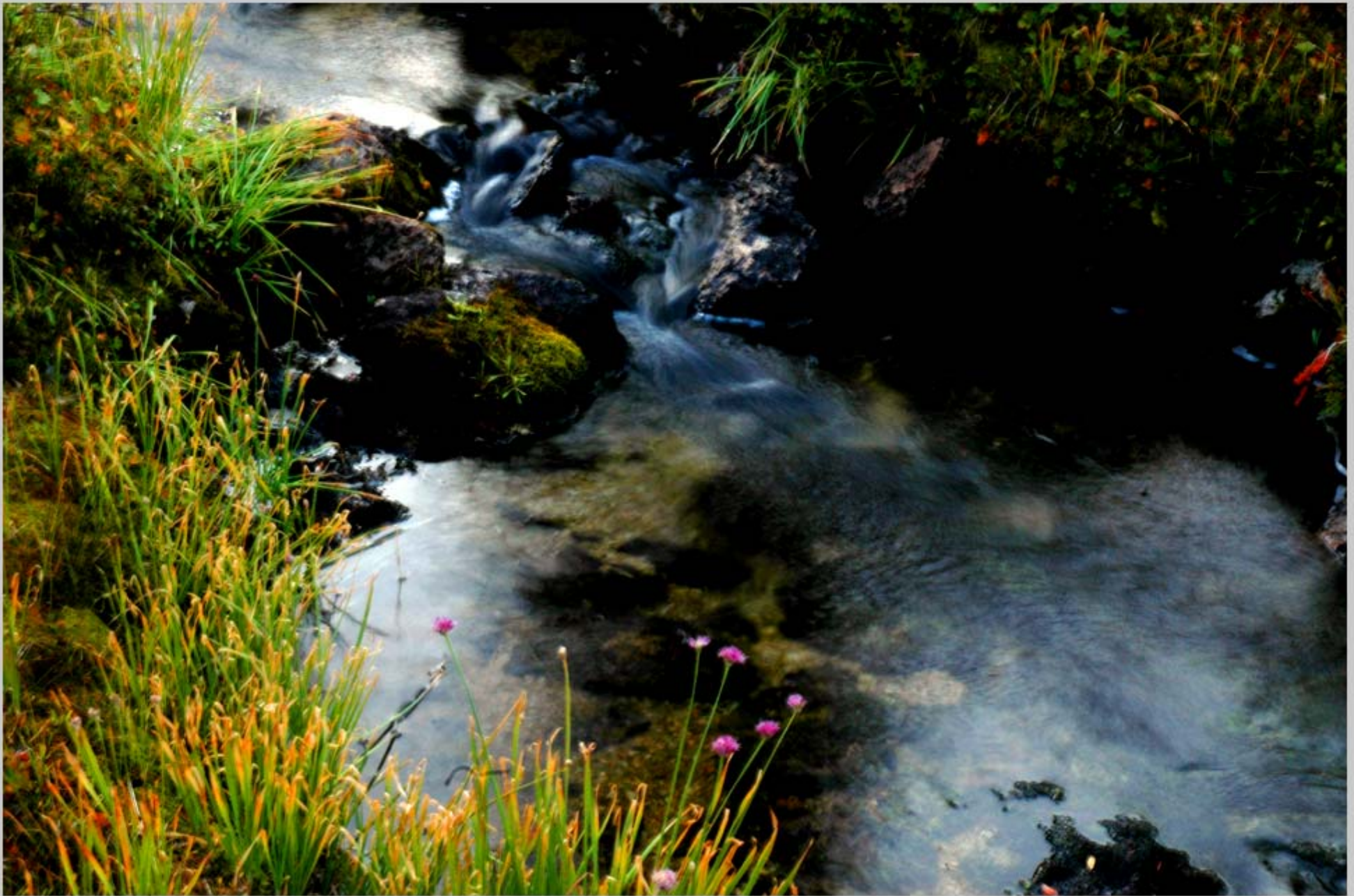


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Holly Brook, late September, above Hidden Lake, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .
On the road in the Northwest of America.

NIGHT ODE

One bright clear flame,
hearth-center of my world at night.
I watch its moods—a
single white candle—one
moment a motionless monk
the next, a fickle young woman
looking for her lost car keys,
flickering back and forth
with the whims of a cool autumn breeze.
Either way, the candle burns wholly now.
Not tomorrow, when markets or farms
may fail,
or yesterday, when other
calamities reigned supreme.
No. The candle burns wholly now,
centered and silent,
letting the winds of the world
and the coming winter

bring what they may.



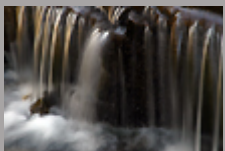
[October Path,](#)
[East Eagle](#)



[Lostine /](#)
[Hurricane Divide](#)



[View Through](#)
[Barbed-wire](#)



Dipper Falls—
whisper veil



Cusick's
Speedwell



Eagle Cap—
reflections



Western
Mountain Heather



Harmonica &
Fiddle Duo—
Ricland Summer Festival



A Broke Bride
between Two Brothers



25 Decades of Tree-time &
WHEN GROWTH IS
'FALSE COMPARE'

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South/
North
Sister
—
first
light



Hut,
Black
Butte



Ponderosa
Pines—
after burn



Manzanita
Spring!

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October Path, Northend of East Eagle . . . Eagle Cap Wilderness
On the road in the American Northwest.

CHILL MOUNTAINS OF THE HEART

Wind out of nowhere,
Rocks fracturing from high vertical cliffs,
O Chill mountains of the heart,
When will I learn the ancient Art
of stonepine and nutcracker?
Of making my stash of seeds of hope,
come good years, and come bad.
Chill mountains of the heart,
steep descent into the winding waters of compassion,
slow steady rise of mist and broken light,
razor ridge dividing known from unknown,
and unknown from unknowable,
Horizon forever retreating as I come near.
O Sheer signal fire of peace.

*Hummingbird Pass,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, X.29.2008*



Lostine River Valley & Hurricane Ridge, view North from Upper Lake, Eagle Cap Wilderness
On the road in the American Northwest.

DEATH EXPERIENCE—a poem from the German by *Rainer Maria Rilke*

We know nothing of this going away, that
shares nothing with us. We have no reason,
whether astonishment and love or hate,
to display Death, whom a fantastic mask

of tragic lament astonishingly disfigures.
Now the world is still full of roles which we play
as long as we make sure, that, like it or not,
Death plays, too, although he does not please us.

But when you left, a strip of reality broke
upon the stage through the very opening
through which you vanished: Green, true green,
true sunshine, true forest.

We continue our play. Picking up gestures
now and then, and anxiously reciting
that which was difficult to learn; but your far away,
removed out of our performance existence,

sometimes overcomes us, as an awareness
descending upon us of this very reality,
so that for a while we play Life
rapturously, not thinking of any applause.

Rainer Maria Rilke (tr. Cliff Crego)



View Through Barbed-wire, Oregon landscape . . .

On the road in the American Northwest.

THE ENERGY OF CORRUPTION

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

"Clean coal" is like the idea of a healthy, 'low-tar' cigarette;
"Safe nuclear" is like a time-bomb with but a slightly
longer fuse.

O vested interest, clouding the future with the smoke of
deliberately deceptive false promises. I say to you, when
the dust settles on the present dim era of fire and hydro-
carbons and it is dug out by future archeologists, the central
ethical question asked will be not why the EXXON's of the
world lied with such dogged tenacity—that is, after all, only
human—but rather why the rest of us, privileged as we are
to live under the hard-won protections of freedom of thought
and speech, believed their cheap propaganda, and as servile
citizens of the congregation of the faithful followed their lead
straight to the inner circles of Hell.

SIGNS OF EMPIRE

(I)

The second surest sign of the self-corrupting, decadent,
one-sided power of Empire, is when children grow up
learning no other culture, no other language, than their
own. The first, is when teachers of the young know this
to be true, and couldn't give a damn.

(II)

With the perversion of the sheer brilliance and great promise of the new information technology into the dark and sinister world of systems of surveillance, at a stroke, the meaning of the word, web, flips from "*connected*" into "*gotcha!*"

*Broken Bridge Camp,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, X.29.2008*



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Dipper Falls, whisper veil, Cliff Creek . . . Eagle Cap Wilderness
On the road in the American Northwest.

Epiphany is one of those beautiful words that comes to us from the ancient Greek. It means *to reveal*, in the sense of *sudden insight* or inspiration.

In a way, insight, which for me is an actual movement of energy, or intelligence, is everything. For me, insight is not something personal, but rather *moves*, or is *in resonance with*, but not of, the individual. Insight is what I look for in works of Art. I find it, for example, in Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, as well as in Glenn Gould's performance. I find it in certain seminal addresses of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Or the ideas and style of thinking of Buckminster R. Fuller. Or the brilliance of Benoit Mandelbrot's fractal geometry. And, of course, I find it everywhere in Nature, especially the forms as revealed to the human eye in the *not-too-big* and *not-too-small* dimension of what I think of as the magical middle realm.

It seems to me that present-day Western culture has for the most part turned its back on this energy of insight, and already two or three generations ago has filled the empty space with entertainment. That is why wildness is, and has always been, so important. Because it turns off the entertainment, and turns off this incessant chatter of voices telling us what to believe and think.

Three legendary moments of insight I think every child should learn by heart, and which are especially dear to me, are brought together here in a little set of three 37-step poems. The Greek philosopher, *Pythagorus*, who used and explored the world of sound for much of his model of creation, appears in the poem at the moment he hears a musical octave ringing out on the heavy anvils of a blacksmith's shop and on the spot figures out why. The teacher / student duo—one of the greatest of all time—of *Anne Sullivan* and *Helen Keller* appears in the second at the moment Helen—both deaf and blind—suddenly sees that every thing in the world has a name. This moment has always seemed to me to manifest the very essence of what learning is, and like a lightning bolt out

of nowhere, calls into question mechanistic theories of the mind. And lastly, there's our humble earth-bound reptile as it for the very first time takes to the air on newly discovered feathered wings. I've always felt that this hypothetical evolutionary moment is directly linked to humankind's own great leap, an ephiphany or bold leap of spirit if there ever was one, many eons later all the way to the Moon and back.

* * *

In order for a variation form like this to work, one needs to do them in sets or sequences. Try reading them out-loud to get a sense of how the rhythms and accents change in surprising ways while still keeping to the basic 37-step pattern:

Epiphanies

(I)

Lover of wisdom,
Pythagorus hears two anvils
sound octaves at a blacksmith's shop.

Suddenly,

half of weight is half
the length of a string—lightly touched.

(II)

*"Wa-ter. Wa-ter. Wa-
ter."* Thrice the fingers of the teacher
write in the palm of a girl's hand.

Suddenly,

all things have names, and
the girl sees more than those who see.

(III)

Strangest of creations,
a serpent with arms and feathers
slithers to the edge of its cliff.

Suddenly,

take-off, thin air! O
tracks left in the dust of the moon.

*Thompson Meadow,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, X.23.2008*



Cusick's Speedwell (*Veronica cusickii*),

Cusick's Speedwell is a member of the *Figwort* family endemic to the Wallowas, named for *William C. Cusick* of Union Oregon, one of the first botanists of the Blue Mountain & Wallowa ranges (1842-1922). The common name 'speedwell' comes to us from the traditional healing properties associated with the genus, such as speeding the healing of wounds. The botanical generic name is as ancient as it is interesting. **Veronica** refers, of course, to *Saint Veronica*, a woman from Jerusalem who is said to have offered her veil to Jesus on the way to the Calvary-hillside of the Crucifixion—to wipe the blood and sweat from his brow. Legend has it that the cloth retained the imprint of the image of Jesus' countenance.

THE LITERAL MAN & THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF METAPHOR

The world of the literal man—a state of mind and being which manifests now in both genders equally—is a world of extreme fragmentation. In this broken-apart world of the literal man, the natural weave of connectedness, of the interdependencies of wholeness, has been ripped apart, and 'facts' and 'things' exist in all but complete isolation. It is a world, therefore, in which image and metaphor, or rhythm and movement, not only make little sense, but are no longer even possible. And it is a world, because nothing is connected to anything else. ethical responsibility is reduced to the utter indifference of the tightest of circles around the exigencies of his own personal survival.

It may come as little surprise that the literal man makes the perfect foot soldier in the technological armies of mechanistic science that have given us the modern weapons industry. The brilliant physicist who without the slightest ethical qualms diligently increases the yields of a new nuclear device; Or the virtuoso economist who spins the market trends with great short-term success and methemathematical élan while diligently ignoring every single relevant feature of the wider, long-term context; Or the clever genetic engineer of genius who diligently designs seeds that self-destruct, seeds that you must buy because his goal is to make sure that no others are available, and that terminate in their own infertility.

The final extreme? A world resource empire that hordes the very water of life itself, and which sells it back to us at a price only he, the literal man, can afford. This is the "participate or perish" world of the literal man, which, as posited at the outset, is a state of mind and being which manifests now in both genders equally.

COMPLICATION?

Complication—in contrast to the richness of natural *complexity*—is about making things at least twice as difficult as necessary, thus making it easy to do really difficult things not at all.

BETWEEN THE WORLDS . . .

All mischief begins with distance. Poet,
be the messenger between the worlds.

*Broken Bridge Camp,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, X.29.2008*



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Eagle Cap, reflection in Hidden Lake . . . Eagle Cap Wilderness
On the road in the American Northwest.

POOL OF THE MIND

The mind is like a pool of water
that reflects many mountains.

Rarely, if ever, do we
see the mountains directly.

Better to keep the water pure,
protected, whole.

*Pine Lakes Camp,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, X.29.2008*



Western Mountain Heather (Cassiope mertensiana) VIII.24.08

Cassiope was a favorite genus of the 19-th century conservationist

and lyrical naturalist, John Muir. The extraordinary beauty of its tiny inverted urn-shaped flowers makes it easy to see why.

I can't help thinking of the ancient Greek notion of '*hebe*', the bloom of youth or the very peak of beauty of the young women as she is about to become a bride. Hebe, of course, is also the name of the goddess, daughter of Zeus. Homer speaks of her as the princess who was the divine domestic, a cupbearer to the gods. At a rocky 2200 meters, on a west-facing slope, one can't help bending down on one's knees and exclaiming, "*Good god that's beautiful!*"

FUNDAMENTALISM

Fundamentalism—whether economic, or political, or religious—is always based on the twin principles of Absolute Belief & *Absolute Authority*. That is why fundamentalism is incompatible with democracy, and necessarily eschews all rational debate. And why every house built upon its foundations is necessarily a prison, a prison on the verge of collapse.

CIRCLE?

Between the larch needle and leaf of the water-lily,
Nature draws its circle.

HEROES, PAST & FUTURE

In the past,

war-makers
were
immortalized
in
the
great
epics
of
the
world
poetic
tradition
as
the
heroes
of
the
age.

Now
that
it
has
unquestionably
become
a
question
of

*non-violence
or
non-existence,*

the
term
'heroic'
only

seems
to
ring
true
for
the
future
peace-maker,
the
future

King's,

Gandhi's,

Einstein's

and

Krishnamurti's

of
the
world
who
dare
to
draw
a
still
wider
circle
of
compassion
and
enlightenment
around
the

whole.

*Broken Bridge Camp,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, X.29.2008*



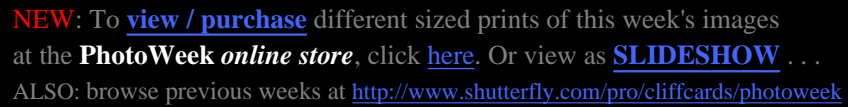
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*Harmonica & Fiddle Duo, Joe Otman and Emma Whitnah
Richland Summer Festival VII.12.08, Northeast Oregon, U. States . . .*

Music? The one thing humans do that makes the rest of Nature jealous.

*Broken Bridge Camp,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, X.29.2008*



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Broken Bridge, Pine Creek, South Wallowas, Oregon . . .
On the road in the American Northwest.

A broken bridge between two brothers,
Always sad, never needed,
Who will be the first to repair?
The one who waits, or the one who doesn't dare?

The water that passes still remembers,
When fish returned with gifts from the sea,
And hurts and bruises mended easily,
In games of war played round the family tree.

Who will be the first to remember?
A broken bridge between two brothers,
Always sad, and never, never needed.



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*Stonepine Timeline (Whitebark Pine, *Pinus albicaulus*), Eagle Cap Wilderness*
On the road in the American Northwest.

WHEN GROWTH IS '*FALSE COMPARE*'

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

*"What grows is good.
And if something is good,
it is good to want more of it..."*

O Irony of ironies! Behind the intellectual facade of economic growth lies the harsh, hidden reality of a very real natural *anti*-growth. Anti-growth is the wholesale destruction, either by means of over-use or contamination or both, of the shared vital resources of the world community such as air, water, forests and soil. Anti-growth is not just an unfortunate side-effect; it is an absolute necessity needed to fire the engines—and that is the ironic twist here—that sustain the illusion projected by what in essence is a false analogy.

Let me start over again:

As every poet knows, there's nothing worse than, to use Shakespeare's phrase, '*false compare*.'

Language shapes perception. And perception shapes action. Analogy, or the *this-is-like-that* of thought, is finding similarity in difference, a common feature in seemingly different patterns of movement.

For example, we say: "*Forests grow*." And by analogy, we say: "*Economies grow*." We all know that forests actually grow, whereas the transference of growth as a property to describe patterns of change in economies is an entirely different matter. This may be more or less true, or it may be false.

My contention is that it is false.

But let's consider natural growth for a moment.

As we all know, from the human perspective, growth is more often than not a slow, steady process. So slow in fact that we normally can't see it. That is why time-lapse

photography of a flower bud unfolding, or a glacier retreating, is so revealing. Natural growth is frequently measured in areas of space so small, and spans of time so long, that it lies beyond the grasp of both our normal sense of proportion and perception. For example, lichen grow about 1 centimeter a century; Or the humus layer of soil around treeline increases its depth 10 times slower yet: about a centimeter every thousand years. That's about 30 human generations for every finger-width of soil stable enough to support the alpine grasses under your boots!

A second key point is that natural growth is normally cyclical. And it is cyclical in a highly rhythmic way. As everywhere in Nature, there are limits. And because there are limits, there is balance. In other words: without limits, there can be no balance; as well as the inverse: if there is imbalance, limits have somehow broken down. So natural growth is not normally simply a matter of endless linear expansion, and especially not the species of expansion known as *exponential increase*, as I've argued elsewhere. Increase or expansion in Nature is always balanced by a complementary and equally essential movement of contraction, decline and, ultimately, death. Nowhere do we see this from the human perspective more clearly than the life of the soil, to which we all know that we too shall return some day, and which depends on this continuous composting and transformation of dead and dying organisms for its sustained vitality.

Now let's return briefly to the false analogy.

When politicians or theorists speak of economic growth, they do not have in mind anything remotely similar to the .01 mill growth rate of the mountain soils mentioned above. They are really thinking of largely unnatural systems of linear expansion—a kind of always 'gitting bigger' stretching onto without limit to infinity—as well as the notorious expansion-of-expansion of compound interest. Who would not, after all. If you are focused on dollars or euro amounts, a change or expansion rate of just 5% compound interest will more than double your money in just 16 years! But how long can this unlimited interest-on-top-of-interest continue before it collapses, as it must? In contrast, natural growth is by definition always limited and self-sustaining. And, as suggested above, in a vicious inversion of meaning, that the real growth of the natural world, like that of the stonepine pictured above or the forest in which it grew, will be razed to the ground in order to sustain the illusion. In my opinion,

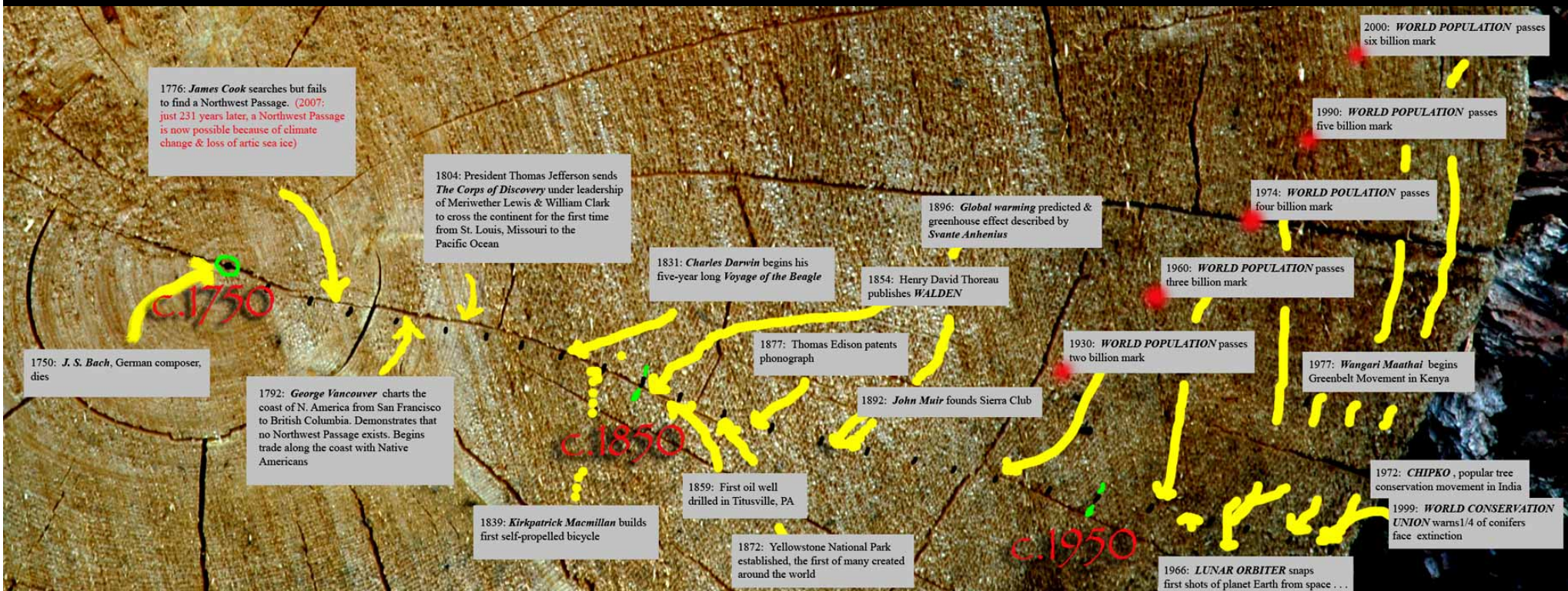
this is actually the case.

And so we come full circle to the dead-end of the speculative mind, so at odds with the forester's, or farmer's, or rancher's point of view. It is a confused and confusing notion of growth which rests on the hope and downfall of every gambler:— that each toss of the dice will result in the impossibility of a straight series of wins going on without end.

A shaky notion of growth and 'false compare,' indeed!

*Broken Bridge Camp,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, X.29.2008*

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Stonepine Timeline (Whitebark Pine, *Pinus albicaulus*), Eagle Cap Wilderness
On the road in the American Northwest.



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Photoweb Northwest I.26.2009

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High Wallows—

by Cliff Crego

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*Distance, view Southeast over Snake River Canyon into Idaho,
snowshoeing into the Eagle Cap Wilderness | [buy this photo](#) |*



*Distance, view Southeast over Snake River Canyon into Idaho,
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MIRROR OF RELATIONSHIP

Every pattern is like a story.

Every story, like a path.

And every path is like a stream,
not of water, but of relationship.

As one moves through the land,
each step reveals something
new about ourselves,
about the land,
and about the much larger spirit
which envelopes both.

*Stonepine Overlook,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
I.19.2009*



[Breaking Winter
Camp
1.15.2009](#)



[Winter
Camp](#)



[Two Ponderosas
above Pine Valley](#)



[TOPO—
Cornucopia Peak](#)

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[S-
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Winter
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Group,
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Breaking Winter Camp, on the way to the Eagle Cap Wilderness | [buy this photo](#) |

Stable high-pressure weather and good, safe snow. What more can one ask! To get up to the wilderness from here is another two-day trek.



Winter Camp, view West to Sparta Butte | [buy this photo](#) |

Stable high-pressure weather and good, safe snow. What more can one ask!
To get up to the wilderness from here is another two-day trek.

On the road in the American Northwest.



Two Ponderosas above Pine Valley Inversion . . . | [buy this photo](#) |
On the road in the American Northwest.



[Sparta Butte,](#)
[January](#)



[The Elkhorns,](#)
[across January](#)
[Inversion](#)



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Sparta Butte . . . | [buy this photo](#) |
On the road in the American Northwest.



The Elkhorns, across January Inversion . . . | [buy this photo](#) |
On the road in the American Northwest.



January, last light . . . | [buy this photo](#) |
On the road in the American Northwest.

DOUBLE BIND

Our troubled relationship with the Earth?

God wrote the music.

The Devil conducts.

Everyone must play in the symphony of Life.

The contract says, "*forever.*"

So we push our buttons,

and stroke our strings,

at his command.

Remember: Everyone must play.

The contract says, "*forever.*"

He reminds us, "*Poor child. There's no*

way in Hell you could live without the results."

And we believe him.

*Stonepine Overlook,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
1.19.2009*



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TOPO--Cornucopia Peak Area, Southside of Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .
On the road in the American Northwest.

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Winter Track S-curve . . . | [buy this photo](#) |
On the road in the American Northwest.

TOWN

A place to park the truck.

100 steps to the Post Office,

40 to the Café,

20 to the Bar.

A place of reduced speed,

where we drive slow enough to see if a neighbor

has a new girlfriend, or wave politely at all the old folks,

but fast enough not to worry about

all the broken windows,

or that children no longer play on the streets,

or even the high price

of bad land.

*Stonepine Overlook,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
1.19.2009*



January, Above the Clouds . . . | [buy this photo](#) |
On the road in the American Northwest.

BOOTMAKER

for Gary Johansen

Long after the dust and hubbub
of mechanical motion settle to the ground,
and cars and trucks and snowmachines
are out of fashion
or out of gas,
the humble bootmaker
will still be bent over
his worktable,
stitching together the soles
that allow us to do what
we do best: walk.
Without his art, how would
we climb up into the clear, lighter air,
just below heaven, above the clouds,
where we can see over the top of daily life's rancor?
I may think I climb solo, but no:
good beginnings are more than half the ascent,

and the beginning of each climb
is prepared and secured,
hammered and glued, by the bootmaker's craft.
I celebrate his work, which gives us these
coverings for tender feet in a harsh world
that are made to last.

*Stonepine Overlook,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
1.19.2009*



January, Evening Textures . . . | [buy this photo](#) |
On the road in the American Northwest.

Walking the World: *Look at the Mountain!*

Having physically touched and lifted countless rocks, my eyes sense effortlessly the mountain's rough, cold texture, its immensity, its great weight.

But this image, while certainly as real as it is beautiful, is still just an image, strangely ungrounded, distant. Looking through my glass, I notice how the sight of two climbers slowly crossing a steep snowfield instantly provides not only proportion, but also a feeling for absolute size—a kind of kindred presence, bringing that which is far away closer to home.

And yet, to actually cross the snowfield *oneself*—step by step, breath by breath—is in some profound sense truly to make the mountain your own. And that's the wonder of walking: it threads the world and oneself together into one, inseparable weave. I say the world is not just seen, but *made*—made with the soles of my feet.

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Cornucopia Group, Early Evening Light . . . | [buy this photo](#) |
On the road in the American Northwest.

THE PASS

The pass is clearly in view,

but the way --
how impossibly confused.



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*Winter Geometry, above an "inversion sea," Little Eagle Meadows,
Eagle Cap Wilderness . . . | [buy this photo](#) |*
On the road in the Northwest of America.

INAUGURATION

A timeless day,
just below heaven, above the clouds,
new snow from horizon to horizon.
It says to me:
Cars do not exist.
Money does not exist.
America does not exist.
Hand in hand, the first man and woman
look through my eyes down on
what seems like mile-thick glacier ice,
filling the valleys with motionless white water,
sweeping away all that has been.
So the world celebrates the first day
of its new beginning without fanfare,
without the confusion of false promise.
The trees are witness.
The air is witness.
The rivers are witness.

O suffering of the world.

What have I done today to end it?

It says to me:

Nations are not great.

Armies are not great.

Flags are not great.

See the bridgemaker, speaker of many tongues,

the planter of trees and freer of rivers,

It says to me:

A timeless day,

just below heaven, above the clouds,

Clear signs of a birdless sky.

*Stonepine Overlook,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
1.20.2009*



[Before setting up
new basecamp . . .](#)



[Winter
Morning
Geometry](#)



[Spiral Planes
Fractal &
*The Devil Stands on
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[25 Decades of Tree-time &
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Before setting up new basecamp, evening tea . . . | [buy this photo](#) |

Stable high-pressure weather and good, safe snow. What more can one ask!
The caldera-like, large semicircular ridge of what I call the Cornucopia Group

which leads to *Copncopia Peak* (not visible in photo) is in the background.

On the road in the American Northwest.

DISTANCE

A view with
80 kilometers to the South,
50 to the West,
more than enough space methinks
to untie the mess of knots
I've made of myself again.

Back at the 'Office,' I tend to forget:—
eyes sore, pinching every penny,
fretting myself into a churning
chaos of tense twists and turns.

You there, friend:—be the one
who runs me out of town,
and locks the door.

Stonepine Overlook,

Eagle Cap Wilderness, 1.19.2009



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Winter Morning Geometry, southside of the Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .
On the road in the American Northwest.

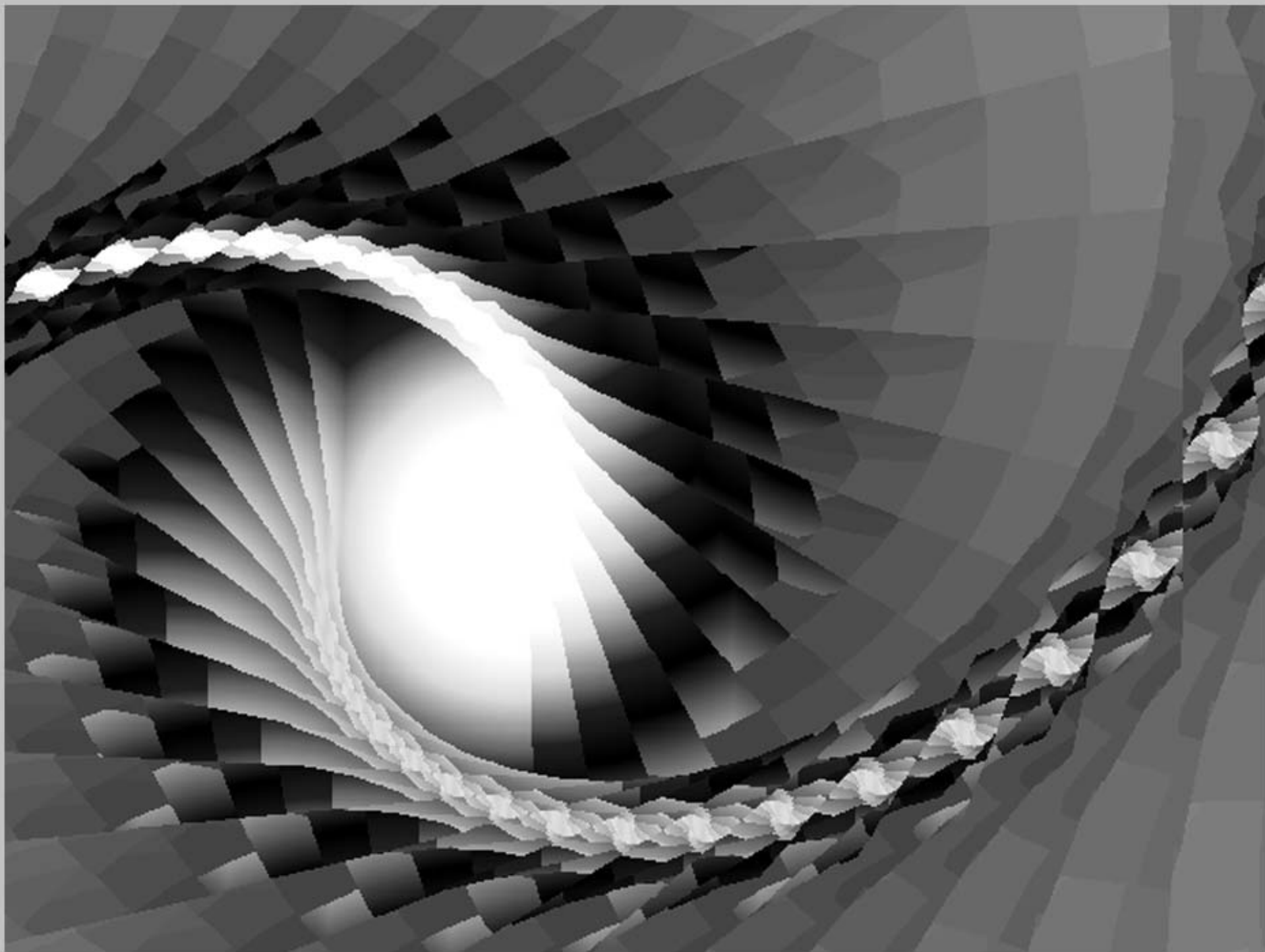
Once there is difference, there is complementarity.
Once there is complementarity, there is movement.
Art happens in the balance thereby created.

Sometimes we look for Art where there is intense activity, either on the performance stage or in the political arena. But how frequently we come away disappointed because of the lack of any movement of a significant kind. Despite the camouflage of all the noise and commotion, as well as the allure of the superficial sophistication which comes with complicatedness and unnecessary difficulty of every description, we feel somehow cheated because what is happening makes no real, that is, *relevant*—difference.



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Spiral Planes Fractal . . .

On the road in the American Northwest.

Walking the World: *The Devil Stands on the Other Side*

*Intellect builds good roads,
but only intelligence
knows when not
to build them.*

I can already hear the intense, steady roar of the stream, swollen with all the rain of the past three days. For hours now, I've been climbing up through dense spruce forest. The trail is faint and little used, and there's a lot of windthrow about. It's remarkable how these difficulties transform the story-like movements of a well-made path into something more like an abstruse argument, full of many hard to follow twists and turns. As the rain begins to mix with mist and wet snow, I make a short descent to a large, open meadow which must have been cleared generations ago for pasture. Towards the back, with its rear wall built against a sheer granite rockface, there's an abandoned shepherd's hut. Made of stone, facing South, the hut's surrounded on either side by groves of larch trees. The delicate yellow of their needles reminds me that the nights will be getting colder now. And that it won't be long before I can expect heavy snow above timberline.

To me, places like this, especially when I've been out walking for weeks on end and I'm alone, seem filled with an almost surreal resonance of the past. It's as if all that once happened here continues invisibly to echo like sounds lost in space, and to reach out in a subtle way to touch and shape the present moment.

Why is there no one here? Not that long ago, they probably would have used the hut for five or six weeks during the summer months. They would have made cheese and kept perhaps about twenty or thirty milk cows. One can almost hear the voices of children playing, of the men rounding up the animals, see and smell the smoke of alder rising up out of the chimney.

I lean up against one of the old larches and walk my backpack slowly down to where I can ease it off and onto the ground."That's better", I say out loud to myself. Just to be free of all that weight for a moment! I take out a pocket knife I've had for years and go straight for some bread and cheese I have stashed in the top of my pack. Even though I can't see much past the crowns of the trees, the weather doesn't feel like it's going to get worse. Not much wind, and the barometer's slowly rising.

The meadow is here and there overgrown with weeds. There are patches of spiniest thistle, with its tough central stalk standing a good head or two above all the other plants, and leaves so well-equipped with thorns and sharp edges that even the hungriest of goats would not touch it. A sad form of natural selection, this. Much like how only the most corrupt of men is left standing tall in the fiercely competitive battlefields of politics fired not by ideas, but by money. To the side of the hut, there's an area about the size of two or three small suburban

backyards that's grown into an entire sea of coarse alpine rhubarb, always a sure sign of overgrazing. And of too much manure concentrated in too small a space. Maybe that's why they left.

The hut is clearly marked on the map. "Not much of a place to spend the night," I think to myself. There's also a bridge indicated about hundred and fifty meters southwest of here. That's the water I could hear before I came down to the meadow. I still have three or four hours before I need to set up a camp, but even so it doesn't look like I'll make it over the pass I had hoped for today. Arriving at the stream, I suddenly realize why the trail has fallen into disfavor. The bridge is washed out. Not during the storm of the past few days, but probably a couple of years ago. Raging full and wild, the stream is now a torrent. I ponder the situation for a while, filled with the intense, almost oppressive sound of the rushing water. It's funny. If one's alone, it sometimes takes quite a bit longer for a fairly obvious situation to sink in. I decide reluctantly that, with my heavy pack, it would be too risky to attempt a crossing, so there's nothing left to do but to turn around and go back the way I came. Walking down, a bit wet and weary, it occurs to me how we have come to take our ease of movement so for granted. Like most people, I grew up in a world where roads and bridges were already largely in place and as much a part of the landscape as streams, fields and forests. If this is all one has experienced, it can be extremely difficult to go back in time to get a sense of the land as it once was, and, in many cases, how it might naturally wish to become again. In this sense, perhaps one could say that this original wildness of a place—even that of a thin strip of weeds alongside of a busy highway—never really goes away. And perhaps more than anything else, it's the

movement of walking itself which brings us back into resonance with it. As we walk, we can't help but become more and more sensitive to the profusion of disharmonious structures which have over the years been built upon the land.

This includes, of course, roads themselves. From the walker's point of view, every road has two sides; it makes it easier to get to places, which, because of the road itself and what it brings, are frequently less and less worth going to.

On a long trek like this, through spectacularly rugged mountains like the Alps, easily gaining or losing 1500 meters of altitude in a single day, crossing over ridges, passes and complex glacier fields, I have much occasion to meditate upon this theme of wildness. This is because I still need to drop down into villages, traffic and the noisy chaos of tourist towns every three or four days for provisions. I don't mind though. I find the rhythmic back and forth, with the extreme, razorsharp contrasts of Nature and Culture, both exciting and enlightening. How different things must have been in the not-that-distant past. In the European Alps, which before they were developed in many ways must have resembled the Northern Cascades of the Pacific Northwest, there were places where the Earth would have said resoundingly no, where a road or track would have naturally been brought to a halt by some insurmountable difficulty: a wall of solid granite which could not be by-passed, or a gorge too wide to bridge. One can imagine that some cultures would have perhaps been at peace with such natural limitations, but with this great outward bound movement which is so characteristic of Western culture, with its emphasis on mechanical measure and technol-

ogy, thought projected the possibility of boring a tunnel straight through the mountain, or bridging the gap. And generally, as soon as the means became available, this is precisely what was done, regardless of long-term consequences or possible negative side-effects. As I come back down to the bottom of the narrow valley where I camped the night before, the path leads out onto a concrete dam and across to the other side and another trail. This time with a bridge, I hope. The glacier run-off backed up in the small reservoir has that characteristically eerie, opaque, milky green color. This is but a small, secondary or tertiary dam. The water here is tapped off and led directly through the mountain on to a much larger dam via tunnels more than two and half meters high. What strikes me most about a dam like this, one of the many I've seen on this and other trips, is the utter lack of restraint which it represents. The dam is evidently built simply because it can be built. One need look no further than the dry riverbed opposite the dam to see for oneself the remarkably callous and destructive character of this metaphysics of no limits.

Remarkably, this problem of natural limits is not as recent as we might think. There's an ancient myth which is common both to the German and Italian-speaking areas of these mountains which tells of a possible passageway across a steep and treacherous gorge. One must remember that this was long ago when the lives of the people of mountain cultures were intimately intertwined with the movements of Nature generally, and that they were still very much in awe, not only of the Earth's beauty and abundance, but also of its at times utterly indifferent fierceness. With this in mind, here's how I've heard the story told:

Now, just at the point where a road would reach more friendly terrain and make for easy commerce between up- and lowland villages, there is a fearsome chasm. Here, the river roars so wildly that it dampens the sun with a thick cloud of icy mist on even the brightest of days. And here, one day at the beginning of Spring, the Devil appears. He offers to help the villagers build a bridge to the other side. But there is one condition which must be met. The first soul to cross the bridge must be his. The bridge is built and the villagers try to trick the devil by driving a she-goat across first. But the Devil will not be so easily fooled. He insists that the contract be met in full...

At the same time, it must be said that there is something truly marvelous about the knowledge, the technical ability and, I suppose, the audacity and determination, which enable a large-scale bridge or dam to be built. But may the gods save us from the culture that has this capability, but without any sense of right measure or real necessity, And, more especially, without any love of Earth in its heart. For surely, change always has a potential devil waiting for us on the other side. Seeing this is seeing the fact that, no less important than the power of the intellect which builds the bridge or the dam, is the clarity of intelligence which sees that it would be wrong or inappropriate to do so.

* * *

These are the thoughts which cross my mind as, high and dry and full of gratitude for those who built this simple bridge of but a single log, I pause and look down at the rushing water below me. This sound—somehow it enfolds a secret. Moving from the beginnings of time from high peak to distant sea, it is the sound which brings the cycle round.



Winter Engelmann Spruce . . .
On the road in the American Northwest.

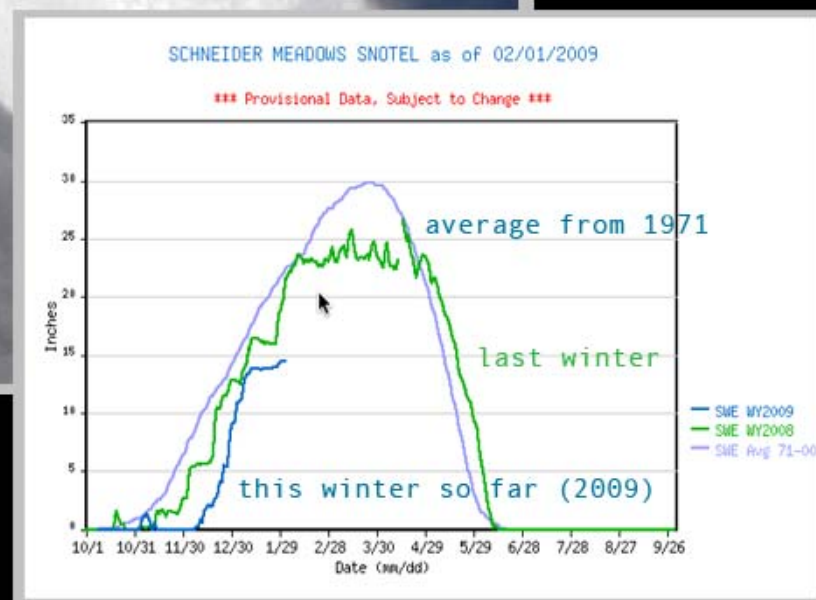
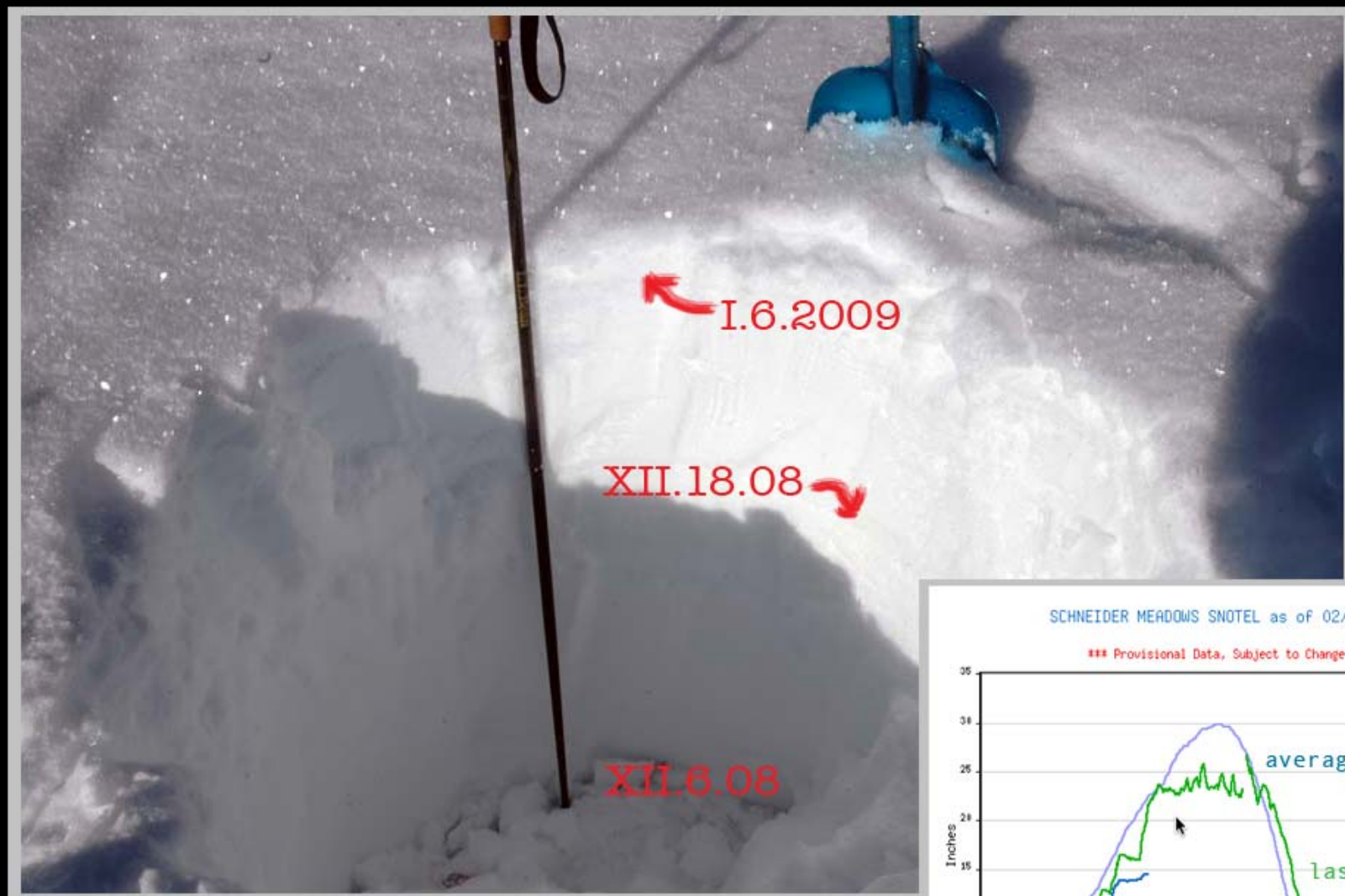


Snow Profile at 2000 m. . . .
On the road in the American Northwest.



Snow Profile at 2000 m. (snow depth ± 120 cm (± 4 feet)., about 25 cm. more than the next photo of a profile made 600 meters lower at 1400 m.) . . .

On the road in the American Northwest.



Snow

Profile at 1400 m. (snow depth ± 95 cm ± 3 feet) The graph to the right shows *Snow Water Equivalent* curves for this winter up to Feb. 1, as well as last winter and the average SWE since 1971. Snow pack depth is since 1950 down as much as 50% on average in many places in the American Northwest. The traditional peak of the snow year is April 1. With climate change and earlier mountain springs,

this peak may now move back in time into March. Notice in the profile above, this winter's snow year started December the 6th.

On the road in the American Northwest.



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Snowmelt Patterns at 2400 m. Surface snowmelt patterns reveal an unusual period of January high temperatures: max. temps. from the

11th to the 18th of January in c.:

0, 5, 4, 8, 11, 10, 7, 6

On the road in the American Northwest.



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Snowmelt Patterns at 1400 m. The surface of the snow, frozen with surface hoarfrost during the early morning hours as pictured here, reveals an unusual period of January high temperatures: max. temps. from the 11th to the 16th of January in c.:

0, 5, 4, 8, 11, 10

On the road in the American Northwest.



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Schneider Cabin I.19.2009. . .

On the road in the American Northwest.



[Schneider Cabin,](#)
[II.19.08](#)



[Schneider Cabin,](#)
[X.15.07](#)



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Schneider Cabin, February aspect, the South Wallowas—
On the road in the Northwest of America.



*Alpine Hut (Chris Cabin), Little Eagle Meadows, South Wallowas,
Oregon . . . On the road in the Northwest of America.*



Copia, Southside . . .
On the road in the American Northwest.



[Cornucopia Peak,](#)
[Northside](#)



[High](#)
[Windswepte](#)
[Southslope](#)



[Westridge,](#)
[from Schneider](#)



[Schneider /](#)
[Westridge](#)



[January](#)
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Conucopia Peak, Northside . . .
On the road in the American Northwest.



[Copia Peak,](#)
[North/South](#)
[Ridgeline](#)
[June, 27th, 2008](#)



[TOPO—](#)
[Cornucopia Peak](#)



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Windswept South Slope at 8400 feet, Copia, Southside . . .
On the road in the American Northwest.



Cornucopia Peak, North/South Ridgeline (8600 feet) View over Pine Valley & the community of Halfway . . .
On the road in the Northwest of America.



View from Schneider Cabin, Copia, Southside . . .
On the road in the American Northwest.



Westridge, seen above inversion, Copia, Southside . . .
On the road in the American Northwest.



Eagle Valley, Cold & Cloudy January. . .
On the road in the American Northwest.



Stonepine Snag (*Pinus albicaulus*) . . . On the road in the American Northwest.



[View to
Elkhorns](#)



[January
Inversion Sea II](#)



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Photograph by Cliff Crego © 2009 picture-poems.com
(created: [II.2.2009](#))



View to Elkhorns . . .
On the road in the American Northwest.

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

There are those inventions which impose structure on the mind, forcing us to think in unnatural ways as we might walk with one foot tied behind the back;

And there are those inventions which are already implicit in the workings of the mind at its very best, letting us create with all the ease of freely flowing water.

The humble *hyperlink*, tying together all the unique thoughts of the world without arbitrary limit or boundaries, brings home and makes explicit a key fact of the new era—that the mind of humanity is indeed somehow one.



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January Inversion Sea II . . .
On the road in the American Northwest.

Oracle—
a reader of signs

*The blackbird runs nervously in
quick staccato steps, yellow beak
thrust forward, then stops,
cocks its ear to the ground, then runs
hurriedly again.*

Old, old:—, she
sits next to the spring.
The water appears suddenly
at the surface of the earth like
a music which steps
into the world
but reluctantly, beginning
over and over

again, rehearsing
in a whisper the faint sounding
sibilants of an almost vanished
tongue. She listens, but
knows not from where the water comes.

Cool, clear, constant
in its flow, the water is un-
touched by rain, snow or summer sun.

Watching, swaying back and forth, she
places her open hand above
a stream of minute
whirlpools, then looks down into the
swirling throat of the
largest, turning her
arm swiftly in a counter gyre,
murmuring something.

all but inaudible.
She leans forward and pinches off
a sprig of watercress, tasting
the stem's peppery
brassica, then swallowing the white

flowers
whole.

* * *

The men gather around in a
tight circle watching
the one, who, seated on the ground,
tosses the yarrow sticks. They all breathe in
with a gasp, their hands
raised into the air,
then pointing down, quickly, lifting
patterns up into

terse talk of
meaning. The man in their middle
slowly traces a form in the sand.

Out of the river,
a turtle rises and crawls to
land, head, neck fully extended
as if it had been from
shore since before the beginning of time.

* * *

The colorful display flashes
as the three men watch the
numbers turn all but instantly
into black figures. The clever talk
and laughter stop as
the message in bold
script steps down from top to bottom,
predicting opportunity, but

great risk...
they must move quickly.

Crack goes the shell, the
heat of the fire fracturing its
underside into myriad
storylines, waiting,
like a hand, to be deciphered and read.

Crash goes the code, the
cold of the night bifurcating
into myriad losses,
everywhere, losses,
like a terrible wind, taking all in its stead.

“All roads lead to the hidden center,”
begins the prophecy. “Very
auspicious. From there, proceed with
the greatest caution,
Follow in steps of 2s and 3s.”

...swallowing the white
flowers whole...

“The yarrow stems should be gathered
in late summer; it
grows frequently to the side of
roads, on poor soils, in large
patches, much space between
completely erect single
stems which are woody and almost square.
The white, sometimes pink,

flowers arrange themselves in tight
umbels in patterns measured in fours,
while the delicate leaves
of many tiny feathers
climb up around the
central axis as a crow calls,
in neat couplets of five

against of two. A powerful plant;
it should
be used with care—.”

The blackbird runs nervously in
quick staccato steps, yellow beak
thrust forward, then stops,
cocks its ear to the ground, then runs
hurriedly again,
a different direction;
it too is confused about the
days, singing now

with hard frozen snow
on the ground.

A fish, (was it a
small trout?) nibbles at the surface
of the quiet pool and is gone,
ripples ringing in the
clear spring water...How did it happen?

Crack goes the shell;
Crash goes the code;
the cold of the night,
a myriad storylines, waiting,
like a wind, taking all in its stead.

How did it happen?
She looks and sees...
She looks and sees...
Before, after,
now.

It took the
whole world
by surprise.

Photoweb Northwest III.3.2009

*15 new images & texts
from the winter
High Wallows—
by Cliff Crego*

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Converging Lines . . .

On the road in the American Northwest.

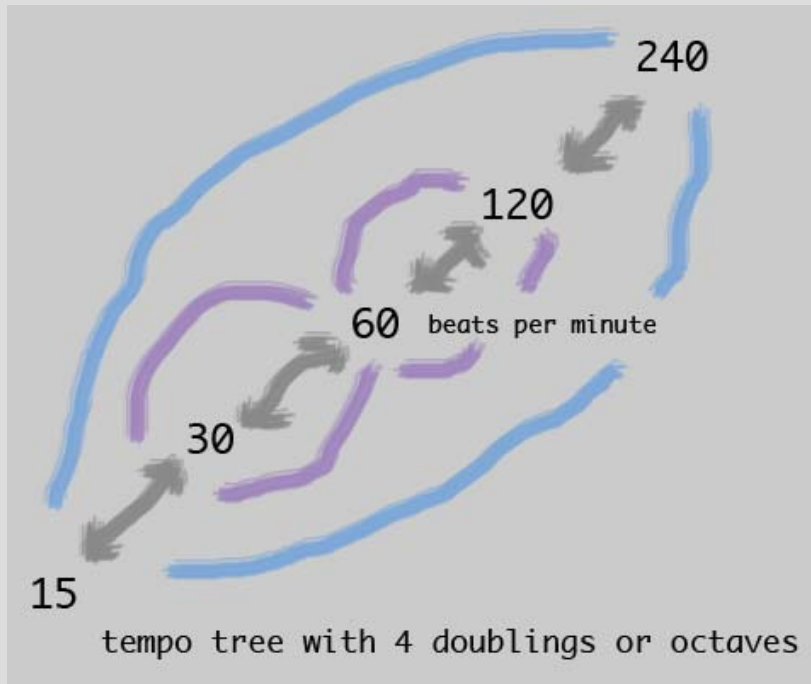


Converging Lines . . .
On the road in the American Northwest.

ON THE TEMPO OF PERCEPTION

Human perception, it seems to me, is inextricably intertwined with the speed or tempo of the human heart beat or pulse. In turn, the pulse conditions our sense of motion in bipedal movement or walking. If we take 60 beats per minute as the mean, or center, or reference point, then its doubling of 120 is fast, while its halving of 30 is slow.

So there are but two central *octaves* or doublings of tempo: 30 to 60, and 60 to 120.* These together form what we might think of as a kind of perceptual temporal tree.



Of great significance in human creative endeavor is

the manner in which this basic framework or temporal measure is then further subdivided and refined, yielding a richness and subtlety without limit. For example, the classical musics of every world culture have all developed and explored this same, common, temporal tree, each in their own unique but at the same time interrelated way.

So what I'm suggesting is in a way, up to this point, self-evident and obvious: that the roots of this great temporal tree are found in the tempo of the pulse, the natural speed or tempo of walking, and, indeed, other human movement of every description and kind. Taken together, they form a kind of central measure of perception.

My next contention, however, is less obvious: that this center of perception has been shattered or corrupted by the very different pulse of machines. In other words, as you step behind the wheel of your admittedly in some ways sophisticated automobile, I'm saying that, instead of the car giving you vastly stronger and faster feet and legs, it is really the other way around: you are providing the car with eyes. What you see is *what the car would see* and not a normal, sensitive, intelligent, aware of his or her environment, human being.

My argument in its simplest form is this: each species of machine has its own characteristic measure. This measure is then superimposed by force on the very different measure of human perception. The mechanism involved is not complicated. We become conditioned and habituated to the imposed mechanical measure. We also come very quickly to tacitly assume that it is not just the only natural way of seeing things, but what is more, we actually come to crave it. This is because of the way, especially as in the case of the automobile, it has not only been culturally sanctioned but also held up as a universally understood symbol of social status and power. In other words, the car has become an end in itself, and embodies, as it were, *through us*. With time,

we are no longer aware of any difference. So the 'seeing' or timeframe or measure of the machine comes to in a large part replace our own.

Let me conclude my argument with the question: how might we test what I am saying? That presents us with something of a conundrum. There is the logic of it, of course, which admittedly may or may not be sound. But just as importantly, there is the experiential aspect. One has to make the test of giving up mechanized movement, at least for a while, simply to see what happens. I have come to think of this as the "*What if?*" of doing without. What will happen if I don't drive? The first logical inspection is very much a part of our great Socratic tradition in the West. The second experiential part is not. That might just be why we are, I think, stuck in a self-destructive view of the world, the workings of which remain unintentionally largely outside of our field of critical vision.

* Obviously, the absolute number of 60 beats per minute should seen as a relative approximation chosen for the sake of clarity; it can easily slide up or down. Also, the two primary octaves have their implied extensional extremes of 15 to 30, and 120 to 240, representing respectively very fast and very slow.

*II.28.2009,
Thompson Meadow,
Eagle Cap Wilderness*



Breaking Winter
Camp
1.15.2009



Snowy Bivi—
sitting out storm



Morning Sparkles &
DEEP SNOW



BEWARE!



[March Storm](#)



[Polyphonic Skies](#)



[TOPO—
Cornucopia Peak](#)



**MAURICE
CHAPPAZ**
**The Vagabond
of the Grande
Dixence—
an appreciation**

[MAURICE CHAPPAZ](#)
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Breaking Winter Camp, on the way to the Eagle Cap Wilderness | [buy this photo](#) |

Stable high-pressure weather and good, safe snow. What more can one ask! To get up to the wilderness from here is another two-day trek.



*The Swiss poet, Maurice Chappaz, standing on the Grande Dixence Dam.
Until 1980, the Grande Dixence was highest dam in the world at 285 meters high,
695 meters wide at the crest, and weighing in at 6,000,000 cubic meters of solid
concrete; it holds back what is still the largest reservoir in the Alps, with its
401,000,000 m. capacity. Completed in 1961, at the height of the world-wide
mega-dam-building craze.*

[The above two photos and the quotation used of an epigraph in the long-line Sonnet
featured below, are all borrowed from an excellent segment in a recent
program on Swiss television, "*Kulturplatz 21.1.09 / Schweizer Fernsehen*"]

On the road in the American Northwest.

THE VAGABOND OF THE GRANDE DIXENCE—an appreciation

pour *Maurice Chappaz* (1916 - 2009)

*"At the end of a writer's life, I think I can say
that it is much harder to make a poem,
than to bore a tunnel."*

There he stands on the dam he helped to build,
Defiant voice of the river that no longer flows,
Spirit caretaker of the eternal snows,
Witness of a great valley's slow, but steady decline.

Gone are the meadows, *gone* are the shepherd's huts,
Gone are the silent ways of the alpine winter.
The stars of Orion no longer guide us
To the chamois' retreat, to the slopes of the rusty rose:—

All fade in the bright lights of rented Chalets,

In the endless highways of Sugarsnow.
Swish goes the scythe of the Banker in Touristland,

Whetted on the bent backs of mountain farmers.
"Tout fini," he cries, his words fracturing
In crystals of frozen ice, a rainbow avalanche of light.

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*II.28.2009,
Thompson Meadow,
Eagle Cap Wilderness*

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(created: [III.4.2009](#))



Snowy Bivi, sitting out a winter storm . . .
On the road in the American Northwest.

SNOW MACHINE

Riding wild chainsaws
over pristine new snow . . .

At a distance,

who would not recognize
the high-pitched grind
of an angry, young man?

Who would not question
the ethics of *my-fun-
is-your-loss?*

SNOW DEVILS

Spirit of the mountains,
turning round and around.

Wind *North* by *Northwest* . . .
Put the cameras away!

WINTER STORM

After every storm
comes the day of clearing.

Hope is the motionless flame,
burning bright,

as the winds
rage.

THIS MORNING

This morning
I awoke in total darkness
sleeping on 3 feet of snow.

Ah, hot coffee made
of crystals of ice!

Before first light, the sound
of a woodpecker drumming on Larch.
Right palce, right time.
March the 1st!
We've made it through
another winter.

*11.28.2009,
Stonepine Overlook,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,*



Morning Sparkles, February Sunlight at 6:56 . . .
On the road in the American Northwest.

WINTER PATHS—*deep snow . . .*

(i) The blank page

of freshly fallen snow.

Where shall our first new path
begin?

(ii) How deep snow heals.

The old wreck
of a car is gone.

Almost gone, the cross.

(iii) In one single night,
the rudeness of machines
and straight lines—
is erased.

(iv) Children and snow
go together: *Try. Make.*

Break. Play. Angel. Snowman.

Wings.

(v) Cars hate snow: *Stuck. Skid.*

Flip. Swerve. Won't start. Crash.

Oh my god, I'll

be late.

(vi) Snow means *slow,*

quiet, peaceful.

Cars mean *fast, heavy—*

get out of the way.

(vii) When two movements

bite or fight each other,

this is called—

contradiction.

(viii) The fieldmouse tracks

go, "*hop, hop.*"

Straight line of tail

never leaves the snow.

(ix) The snowmachine's tracks

cut ruts in the snow;

its sound, smell,

carry miles.

(x) The silence of snow

is deep. If we listen,

we, too,

become silent.

(xi) Overcast again,

new snow tomorrow.

Good day for lichens

and buds.

(xii) If snow comes and

goes in winter, then,

you're not in the

right place for snow.

(xiii) The white death

of snow comes fast.

He went to the barn
and never came back.

(xiv) The way of snow shows:
Never trust the
man who is
absolutely sure.

(xv) Today's traverse
may be tomorrow's trap.
How hard, this art
of waiting.

(xvi) After storm, new snow.
All the old paths are gone.
Time to begin,
once more.

(xvii) See the primrose
nested on south-facing rock—
the patience

of deep snow.

| download [DEEP SNOW mp3](#) |

*III.2.2009,
Snow Wiki Camp,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,*



March Storm, approaching . . .
On the road in the American Northwest.

ON THE ILLUSION OF INDEPENDENCE

(I)

The further we go into the unknown of the wilds, the more we become aware, not, as one might think, of how free, or how self-sufficient, we are. No. It soon becomes clear that each of us is nested in a web, a web of human mutual dependence which always goes two ways. We are indeed a thoroughly social species.

Strange thought, is it not? "*I don't need anybody!*" It comes, some say, with money, especially an excess of money.

Money, as we know, can 'grow' in an abstract way without limit. This gives us the comforting illusion of a natural world which also can grow without limit: giant trees that can be cut down forever; springs that flow clean and pure into eternity. Money also conjures up for us a kind of robust and absolute idea of independence. What I need I buy. At the neighborhood store there is an endless supply of toilet paper and coffee cans. Buy one, and somehow, magically, another materializes to take its place. These are the two prime and unavoidable confusions inherent to money which make it possible—even seem absolutely necessary—to sustain failed, utterly bankrupt, economic systems of thought.

Folly?

Yes, I would say so. We might ask the explorers who went to the Poles 100 years ago. Or those who went to the Moon and back just forty years ago. Once those amazing expeditions were 'out there,' they became necessarily proud exemplars of independence and self-

sufficiency. Yet it was this extreme isolation itself that brought into intensely sharp focus both the limits of such isolation, and the delicate yet movingly beautiful reality of this human web of mutual dependence.

Alone in the physical, earth-bound realm, we are nothing. Remarkably, this is what we grow aware of the further out we go, and the more surrounded by that nothingness we become.

(II)

Always take three of any essential necessity when packing out into the unknown: one, for the soothing illusion of independence; two, for the pride of the self-sufficient; three, for the happy fact of interdependence as you find your way back home.

ZIPPERS

Be honest. Hand on heart: How many zippers do you own? I would guess, that they are many, very many. I tried counting mine, but gave up.

How does a zipper work? I would guess, that if you're like me, you don't have a clue. To be honest, I don't even know how a zipper breaks. But when it does, I can tell you, that much I know for sure.

Zip open, zip shut. Big zippers, long zippers, small, tiny zippers. Inside protected from outside, but without lock & key. Zippers are private, always close to our flesh, our bodies. Zippers hide a secret, that we know that we don't know how they work. The secret lets us act for all the world as if we did.

THE STRING

Between the peg of Nature,

And the pin of Culture,

I span my string.

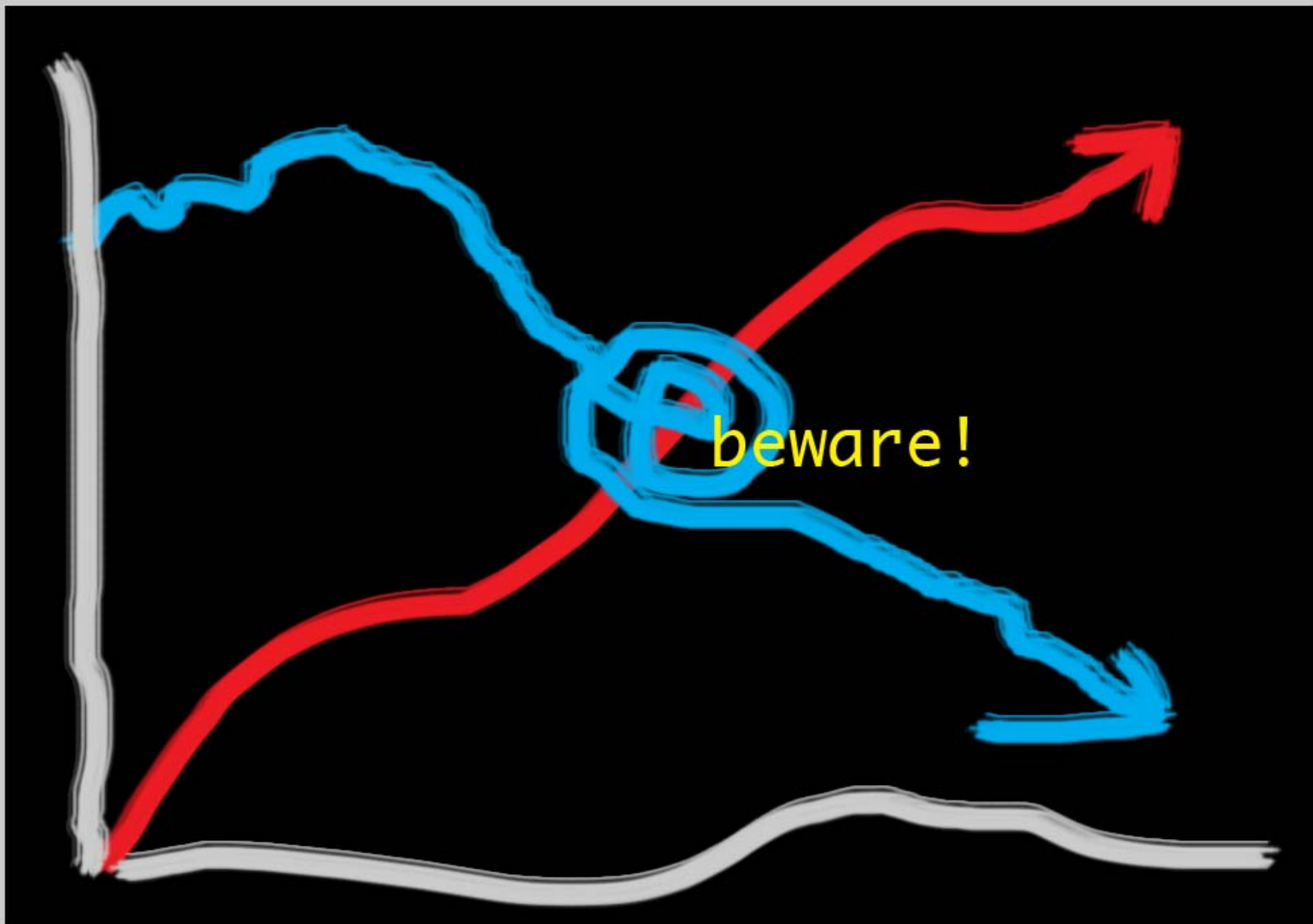
A balance of back and forth,

not too tense,

not too slack,

with art and luck,

my string will sing.



BEWARE! . . .

On the road in the American Northwest.

BEWARE!

(i)

In every Capitalist's office
is a graph that charts
the price of Gold & Oil against
the value of Democracy.

Once the two lines cross,
let the Republic beware.

(ii)

Tragedy of the West:—

Barb on wire;
Barb on plant.

(iii)

A Creationist? One who believes in mules,
but not in donkeys and horses.

TEMPO OF CHANGE

(i)

What are avalanches and wet soft snow
to the wings of a raven?

What is drought to the morning
dewdrops of the fieldmouse?

Perched on constant alert,
some of Earth's creations are
more ready for sudden change
than others.

Who said that? *Change?*

(ii)

Future Crisis? Who would not rather face the Sun,
and not the storm building behind us.

(iii)

Crisis in Photography? If there is a crisis in photography,
then it's to be found in the outmoded, out-of-focus
worldview hiding behind the lens.



Polyphonic Skies . . .
On the road in the American Northwest.

DICTIONARY

My favorite book.

An Indra's net of interdependencies, each word,
each node, reflecting in its own way all the others.
Pick out the crystal of a single word from the ever-
changing shimmer of reflections, hold it up to the
light of enquiry, and watch how the meanings
sparkle on all its sides.

NOTHING

There's nothing better than a mere nothing—a wave,
a call, a letter that receives no reply—to reveal the
negative, destructive reflexes of mechanical thought.

SOLITUDE & FRIENDSHIP

Solitude and friendship are the silence and sound
of the music of my life.

RELIGION

No book. No authority. Heal the break, the loss
of resonance with the sacred.

WEALTH

Wealth comes at you from different directions and speaks two mutually incomprehensible languages. One says, what more can I get, more land, more cars, more fame? The other says, what more can I get rid of, less weight, less to carry, far fewer interruptions.

DENIAL?

The fact we wish to deny most of all is the fact of denial.

VIVA LA WEB!

At the door of the great public library of the world-wide web, is a guy who charges you an entrance fee, watches who you meet inside, and makes notes about the stuff you take home. What kind of library is that?

FORTUNE

Bad luck has been one of my best teachers.

Bad weather, my best excuse for a good rest.



TOPO--Cornucopia Peak Area, Southside of Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .
On the road in the American Northwest.

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High Route, Approaching March Storm . . .
On the road in the American Northwest.

ON JUSTICE & TIME

Justice neither looks forward nor backward. In my view, that would be to make the fundamental error of placing justice in the stream of time. Justice, it seems to me, when seen as a formative principle guiding our ethical actions, is essentially timeless. Think of it this way: Justice is the motionless, neutral center that balances the two sides of the judge's scale.

Justice is about the imbalance caused by wrong action; it is not, in my view, about retribution, or punishment, or answering pain with pain. These are mechanical reflexes of what might best be called the animal or *brutish brain*. Justice is now, or should or must be now, a very much higher principle. I would argue that justice is first and foremost about truth, and about coming by means of cool, reasoned debate to the common ground of a shared perception of what that truth is.

An implication of this view of justice as timeless is that great wrongs of the past, such as colonization by force, or the wholesale destruction of natural preserves for monetary gain, or the deliberate corruption of the democratic process, do not just go away because we choose to ignore them. Rather, these wrongs remain active in an insidious way, rather like massive troubling presences looking down on us from a spiritual or intellectual realm, until they are resolved.

Resolution comes first and foremost by squarely facing the world camera and telling the truth. That is why I think the current Obama White House might greatly contribute to establishing a new trust in the rule of law not just in the United States but in the world as a whole—an ethical

imperative if ever there was one—if they might reconsider their evident intention to, when it comes to bringing to trial misdeeds of past administrations, drop their understandable but mistaken intention of "*moving forward*." Justice, in my view, neither moves forward nor backward. It does not, in fact, move at all. It simply waits, like the neutral, unbiased center of the judge's scale, until the evidence is weighed, and the truth is told.

VETERAN

See that guy over there,

under the bridge?

He was Commander & Chief.

They took away his stars.

The other guys don't like him much.

He gave the orders.

They dropped the bombs.

In Hell-on-Earth, they stand

around and share the same fire.

He's at the bottom

of their ladder of honor.

The bottom.

Hell has its rules, as Virgil knew.

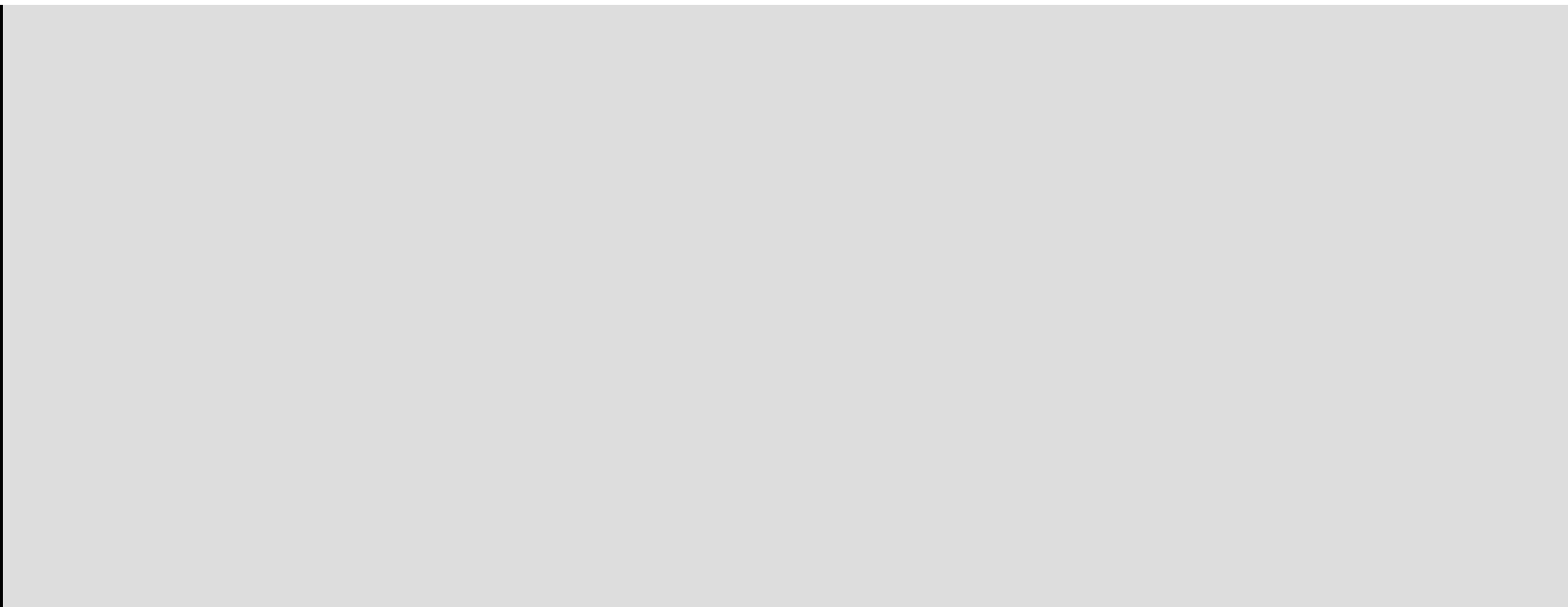
The others tell him their stories.

He still doesn't listen.

They recite by heart on cloudy nights
the speeches of the commanders of Troy
as they breached the ramparts guarding the Greek ships,
that real men have a duty
to fight with the men they command;
They sing verses from *Mutter Courage*;
And repeat again and again Vonnegut's
healing reverse of
the fire-bombing of Dresden,
planes flying backwards,
weapons deconstructed,
laid to rest in the Earth.
He still doesn't listen.
He never did.
He gave the orders.
They dropped the bombs.

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*III.2.2009,
Snow Wiki Camp,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,*



Fieldwork &
FASTING AS
PRINCIPLE



Branching
Pattern



Packing Out—
Snake River
Country



[The Elkhorns,](#)
[across January](#)
[Inversion](#)



[FASTNACHT—](#)
[The Night of Mountain](#)
[Carnival](#)

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FASTNACHT BOGEYS . . . (*I have in mind here the wonderful Swiss mountain village variety of Fastnacht, or Carnival.*)
On the road in the American Northwest.

FASTNACHT—*The Night of Mountain Carnival*

Drumming out the bad spirits of mean-man winter,
Screeching at them with a horror of horns and pipes,
Marching down cobblestone streets and under bridges,
Where monstrous demons tend to congregate.

This is the music of the anti-divine,
Anarchy's orgy against an excess of sanitas,
Recompense for the far-too-much of not enough.
Where *all* is fire, *all* is noise, where *all* is chaos,

When Kronos readies to castrate the Patriarch.
The Pope belches and strokes the buttocks
Of his favorite Swiss guard: "*Let the wretches*

Have their night of fun." But the children know better.
Faces painted for a holy war, they take to the streets.
This is the night that shall balance all the rest.

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*II.28.2009,
Thompson Meadow,
Eagle Cap Wilderness*



Fieldwork II.27.2009, writing the essay below . . .
On the road in the American Northwest.

FASTING AS PRINCIPLE

*The simplest and most powerful
of all possible tests is the test of doing without.*

My theme here is perhaps not what you might expect. Anyone nowadays encountering the word "fasting" naturally thinks of doing without food for a while, deliberately, so as to loose weight, or perhaps as part of some kind of spiritual discipline. My concern here, however, is very much more general. I would like in this context to look at fasting in as broad a view as possible, as a kind of general principle of doing without. Doing without anything. Sex. Coffee. Computers. French-fries. Fasting or doing without really is, as the saying above has it, *"the simplest of all possible tests."* After all, we do not have to learn, or buy anything new for the test to take place. Instead, we simply stop doing something we are used to as a kind of open question. What will happen if I stop doing x? What will happen if I stop drinking soda? What will happen if I stop watching TV, or writing at my computer?

Because we have generalized the principle of fasting in this way, once it is grasped, there is no limit to its application. That is the meaning of the phrase in the epigram above, *"the most powerful."* For it might be not just a question about me, or you, or other separate individuals. It might be a question about a very much larger context. For example, a rancher might ask what might happen if he stopped grazing a particular pasture. Or a farmer might wonder what would happen if she stopped using anhydrous ammonia as an energy input in her corn operation. Or a group of teachers might ask what would happen if they stopped segregating classes by age, or if they stopped all testing.

From here, we can easily see the circle of possibilities widening to include whole cities, states, nations, or even groups of nations. For example, what would happen if

there were a universal highway speed limit of 100 k (60 mph.)? How would that effect CO2 emissions world-wide? Or, more in keeping with doing without, what would happen if cities, or states, or countries would experiment again, as was done back in the 1974 oil crisis, with "autoless Sundays?"

What if? That is the spirit of this surprisingly simple yet powerful question. Just what if . . . ?

Now that we have a rough outline of fasting as a general principle, let me continue by briefly illustrating the how and why of its use.

Why try doing without something anyway? For example, doing without soda. "*What's the problem?*" you ask. "*I like pop.*" Well, that's just it. In most cases, we are confronted by, or trying to solve, a difficulty or problem. The word problem itself is interesting. Its root meaning is, "something thrown at you," suggesting a thing we must deal with whether we want to or not. And, indeed, it is clear that life does seem to be constantly throwing these difficulties at us, of all shapes and sizes, both individually and collectively. Things that are in need of some kind of resolution, that have to be worked out ideally here and now. Say you are chronically overtired, or you are overweight, or that you have a small child that has difficulty focusing on learning tasks, both at home and at school. Or that you have, for the sake of our example, all of the above, which is frequently the case. Then you read something about high fructose corn syrup allergy and suddenly realize that both you and your child drink two or three cans of soda a day. As a test, you decide to stop drinking soft-drinks altogether just to see what happens. Note that I'm not saying one should or should not do this; it's the principle I wish to make clear. And what is clear is this, I think—the elegance of the approach. See for yourself. What would rather do? Take your high blood-pressure medications with Coke, or just stop drinking the Coke—the cause of your problem—and get off the medications entirely?

Now, what exactly are we stopping? Clearly, it's a kind of

habit, is it not? Habits, in the view being explored here, are of key importance. They come in all sizes, large and small, and varying degrees of subtlety. And they by no means merely concern food. It might be something else, like watching TV for hours on end without a break, now nearly universal in Western culture. Or it might be the habit of always driving wherever you go, near or far, even if it's the grocery or library down the street. Collectives of people like nations also have habits, but sometimes with ramifications amplified a thousand fold. For instance, the US has the habit of behaving like the rich brat in the international neighborhood, always having to get its own way. The point of habit is that it is a pattern of doing things that is at once largely unconscious and, at the same time, frequently the cause of our own undoing. Habit is really a unique species or pattern of movement, a pattern of movement of energy that has tied itself up in knots. At best, it is a waste of time and resources; at worst, it may be tragically self-destructive.

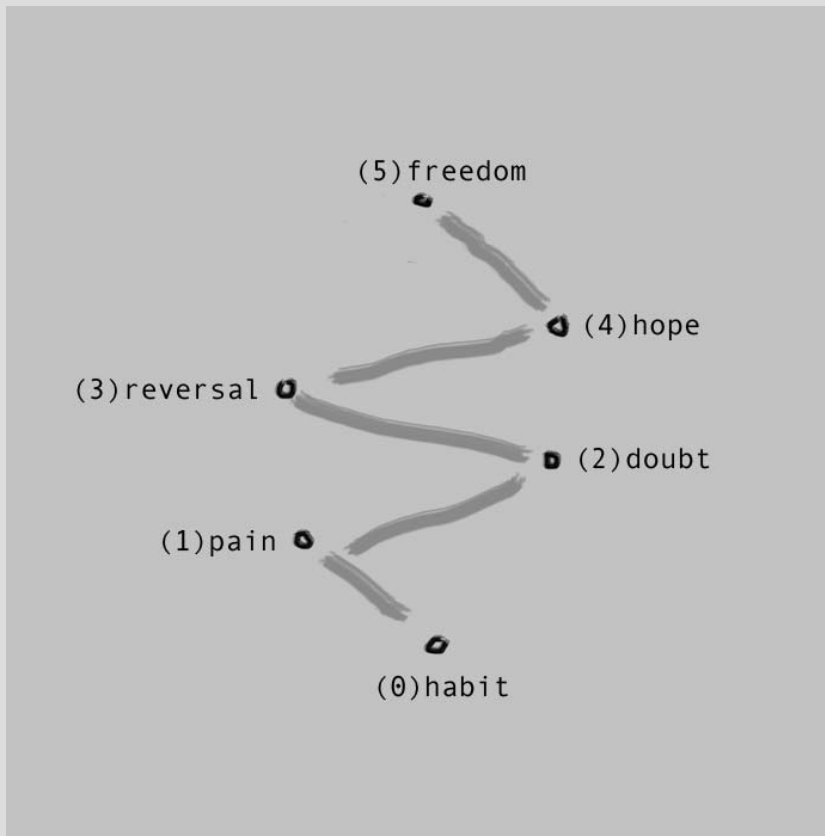
By now, you may ask, *"If habits can so easily be dealt with, and at the same time potentially cause so much harm, why don't we act?"* The answer will in an experiential way become self-evident if you personally try a little doing without yourself. Not necessarily with food. That might require the professional help of a nurse or doctor. Start small. Try turning off your TV, or computer, or cellphone for a week. Then remember: our little epigram above says, *"the simplest of all possible tests,"* not the easiest!

What will very quickly become painfully obvious is that it is not just not easy, it is in fact incredibly hard. At least at first. And that's the answer to our question. Every adult knows the classic symptoms of the pain of withdrawal when we suddenly stop ingesting or taking some substance we are habituated to like coffee, or tobacco, or worse. Addiction is from this point of view simply an extreme form of habit. Nothing more. And the Western bias of sanctioning some addictions like coffee, or chocolate, or alcohol, and prohibiting others is just that: a bias of a specific cultural and arbitrary kind. Generally, the more subtle or a part of the intellectual realm the addictive habit is, the less it is considered as such, and the less it is considered in Western culture as something

of concern. That too, is completely an arbitrary bias.
(More on this below.)

My contention is that, though the object of habit can evidently vary without limit, habit itself as a pattern is always the same. And, what is more, that the reversal of habit—untying the knot as it were—is also as a pattern more or less always the same.

In a future essay, I hope to sketch out what I have come to think of as the "**Five Stages of Freeing Oneself from Habit**": (1) *pain*; (2) *doubt*; (3) *reversal*; (4) *hope*; (5) *freedom*:



In closing, just let me note that the implications of what we have seen about habit so far are considerable, especially in terms of the young. One of the strongest indictments of current economic systems I can think of is

the ruthless attempt to colonize the tastes, wants and desires of the young child through the propaganda of advertising, most of which takes place sitting hour after hour, day after day, year after year, in front of televisions. This is what I meant when I stated that, the more subtle the habit, the less serious the attention Western culture gives to it. Whereas the body is deemed worthy of a whole host of protections, the mind, or spirit, or psyche of the young child is for all intents and purposes completely up for grabs. Appalling, indeed.

This is clearly where mother nature and wilderness may come to our rescue. As it has so frequently in the past ever since humanity came to live so far away from the land in large urban centers, getting out is a way of finding our roots, our grounding. Without going to extremes, if you can carry enough food on your back for just a day, I do not for a moment doubt that you will get a sense of all five stages of doing without, perhaps even a taste of freedom. It's like crossing a pass. It really is. At first you think you'll just never make it. But if you can somehow persevere and keep going, step by step, you may just make it to the other side. It's all downhill from there.

*III. 1.2009,
Snow Wiki,
Eagle Cap Wilderness*



Branch Pattern, Last Light . . .
On the road in the American Northwest.

FOUR METAPHYSICAL MINIATURES

(I)

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

Just as an excess of sugar and salt in the diet drives appetite into the much-will-have-more of culinary runaway, an excess of sex and violence drives film and TV into the obsessive frenzy of too-much-is-never-enough.

Evidently, imbalance seems strongly to favor a kind of synergistic co-evolution in multiple, parallel dimensions simultaneously. Either way, junk food for the eye, or cheap thrills for the tongue, both are not just, as the saying goes, 'tasteless.' More importantly, they leave us with the sad, ever-dissatisfied feeling of self-abuse, an abuse which quickly degenerates into the most hard and fast form of cultural habit.

So the salt & sugar man develops hand in hand with the couch potato sex & violence connoisseur, verily an evolving subset of a potentially new species, an *Homo seduto* shall we say. Yes, "*Man with his ass glued to the seat of a chair.*"

(II)

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

From the ecological, energy household perspective, a deficit of input—especially of an absolute necessity—may become a major force or driver behind creative leaps of the evolutionary process. Who is to say that the wings of flight were not adaptations to the fact of great distances between ever-scarcer sources of water?

(III)

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

Humans are the only species that does not live in a world of fact. Think of it. We do not really directly see the world as it is, but rather as a complex map-like representation. A cattleman's, a goldminer's, a developer's, an ecologist's or a conservationist's map or representation of exactly the same territory will look very different. That is because they each abstract or draw out from any given territory a different set of what they see as potentially relevant facts.

Because we possess this extraordinary capacity to create an unlimited supply of these alternative representations, each with their own varying degree of truth content, we are also provided with a unique and unlimited opportunity to falsify, ignore, deny or lie about facts. That is, as long as we can get away with it.

So we play false, largely because of some form of self-interest, both individually and collectively, with our great natural gift of representation. The task of Philosophy and Metaphysics is to help clean up the game.

(IV)

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

Adaptation? A million solutions to a single problem—
change to fit the fact.

*11.20.2009,
Snow Wiki Camp,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,*



Packing out from the winter Wallowas in Snake River Country . . .
On the road in the American Northwest.

Walking the World: *Backpack Pilgrim*

*The journey of the pilgrim is essentially one of taking
away, or dropping all that is unnecessary,
each step becoming simpler and lighter
than the one that preceded it.*

Today will be a day of descent.

Heading South into the Italian-speaking part of the European Alps, for four days now I've been winding my way through a labyrinthian landscape of small, uninhabited alpine valleys. But now, I've reached a major divide—the point where two vast watersheds meet and diverge, one flowing Northwest, the other Southeast.

Out of this natural articulation of the land into parts, different cultures and languages have emerged and flowered. But here, unlike the busy bordercrossings used by trucks and cars, there are no signs to mark the spot or men in uniforms asking for passports. There's just a clan of alpine jackdaws, all shiny black, riding the late morning thermals in ever-higher spirals, at home on either side of the divide. One bird breaks away from the others, folds its wings and dives headlong into the distance as its body gracefully modulates into something like the small black dot which ends a phrase.

One must prepare inwardly for these high alpine crossings. It is not just the uncomfortable feeling of passing through the strangely alien zone of the north-side of a mountain, with its deep shadows and permanent cold.

Nor is it just the powerful sense of the world contracting around you as the rock walls of a narrow col close in, giving back the metallic sound of your crampons biting into the icy firm snow of early Fall. As the pass grows steeper and the zig-zag of ascent tightens into a line of single steps, one above the other, I always feel the need to compose myself before the final moment of crossing the divide to the other side.

Every crossing is always the first, this great wave space which suddenly rushes in. To gaze out upon the entire breadth and width of a wild valley one has never seen before, taking it in, as it were, in a single breath, and to know that this is where one is headed, full of all the exciting prospect of the new and unknown, is truly something magnificent.

* * *

It's too windy and cold up here to linger long, so I scramble carefully, one step at a time, about three or four hundred meters down a boulder field. Looking ahead, I can already see terrain that is less steep, and a small, green, inviting spot near a stream where I can sit, have something to drink and rest a while. The granite rocks are all about the size of small cars, balanced precariously, one on top of the other. I can't help thinking that, in the Spring, this would be one long smooth glissando or glide down the mountain over hard-packed snow. But now, with Fall, the intense sunlight of the southern exposure has long ago melted all the winter snow. So different— the smooth, continuous rhythm of my ascent over northside ice, and now the irregular, rough jerks and leaps of the more cheerful southside.

The nearest village is still almost two vertical kilometers below, but I can already hear the traffic of a major North / South connecting highway. The sound rises on the same gentle updrafts which carry the jackdaws still circling

above.

* * *

Like so many other areas of contemporary life, mountaineering has unfortunately fragmented into just so many specialties with a characteristic emphasis on outward measure: ever higher, faster or more difficult.

What used to be called "*the freedom of the hills*" is now frequently traded in for a list of personal achievements, attached to one's name like medals on a chest. And, now that most peaks have already been named and climbed, the search for something new and spectacular has taken on the air of the ridiculous, being determined mostly by the clock— "climbed in half the normal time!" Ironically, the clock—that prototypical artifact of city life—was the very thing one wanted to get away from by going to the mountains in the first place.

I must confess that I prefer the more open country of mountaineering as pilgrimage, climbing peaks perhaps when the views are good, but just as contented with a pass. This is pilgrimage not just in the sense of journeying to especially beautiful or powerful sites, but more as a movement. one which, much like poetry itself, essentially takes away, dropping freely what is wasteful or unnecessary.

The cars and trucks of the road below move in a very different direction. The roar of a diesel grinding its way up the sharp curves and steep grades of a mountain pass...

...If greed has a sound, then this is it.

* * *

The bells of a small flock of sheep wake me from my nap. I need to get going. I still have to go down, get food, gas for the cooker and climb up the other side of this valley

and find a new camp before dark.

After a good bit of cross-country rambling, I pick up the faint trace of an old goatherd's trail. It passes a cluster of stone huts, the roofs having collapsed many years ago. Evidently, the stronger vertical order of the walls only very slowly gives itself back to the random shuffle of a natural pile. Further down, gradually leaving the low juniper, cranberries and kinnikinnik of the alpine tundra, I come into the larger, more erect trees of the continuous forest. Here, the trail becomes an ancient ox-cart path, the work of many generations. Each stone is layed like a well-chosen word in a carefully constructed phrase, and worn well, like a phrase worth repeating.

It's so remarkable, this difference between the view within the car, and the view of the highway from the vantage point of the forest clearing where I now stand. Clearly, the automobile is not simply a neutral mode of transportation; it is something more like a way of being, a kind of metaphysics on wheels. To step into the car and close the door is to turn the key which activates an entire self-worldview. Comfortably seated, a gentle breeze coming in from the half-opened window, the speakers in the back playing one's favorite music at just the right volume, enough of the motor's purr filters through to let one know that this is all real and not a mere projection on a screen. The foot on the pedal, the hands on the wheel: it's hard to think of another context which gives us such a strong sense of power and control.

From within the car, all is order and harmony. But this, of course, is an illusion, one which is evidently extremely difficult to break. Seen from the wider context of the car-plus-environment, the car is unequivocally a disorderly, destructive instrument. This is not just because of the toxic gases suffocating the spruce trees of the forest through which I now pass. It's also because cars have driven us into a state of isolation and indifference which

at once destroys both the land and, in a far more subtle way, the sensitivity necessary to see the destruction.

Tragically, as every environmentalist knows, as long as we remain within the highly artificial world of cars and car culture, everything will appear perfectly okay. *“Hey! What’s the problem? Get out of the way!”*

* * *

Crossing a foot bridge over the road, I look down on the steady flow of trucks, motorcycles, campers and cars. This is a flow which has tremendous mechanical power behind it. Listening to the noise it generates gives one a sense of how difficult it will be to change. But there is also the ever-present possibility of simply stopping, getting out of the car and venturing up to higher ground. To pause is evidently momentarily to dissipate the energy that is caught in the loop which sustains the illusion. In the gap, there is the potential of new awareness, a new understanding, a new beginning. Perhaps I’ll return to the car, perhaps I won’t. But, as the jackdaws have always known, from the land far above the road, the views are always superb.



Westridge, seen above inversion, Copia, Southside . . .
On the road in the American Northwest.

BAPTISM

The preacher was new in town.

He had his work cut out for him,

that much he knew.

In a land where rain is rare, and drought common,

it is hard to break the sacrament of

living, holy water,

but here it has been done with a vengeance

and forgotten about generations ago.

Here, at the village center, stands no well,

no fountain offering the wayfarer the gift

of the waters of *this* and *this place only*, where

a young man would come first to drink after

returning from war, or an exhausted

midwife would go to wash her hands

with the returning light of day.

In its place now—this even a child can prophecy—

will be a filthy place for cars and a phone that takes

your money, but doesn't work.

The preacher was new in town.

He had his work cut out for him.

More than just a surfeit of funerals.

He knew, although he couldn't say it in words,
nor had he been taught this at school or in books,
that this was a land where nothing was sacred anymore.
Nothing about it. Not even water.
And this in a land where rain is rare, and drought common.
In the past, when there was still a place for horses
next to the south doors of the wooden church,
under the deep-rooted, broad-leaf trees—
the silver maples, the black walnuts, the elms—
brought all the way from the richer,
greener fields found east of the Ohio country,
and neatly-dressed women of all ages
still had a faint sent of freshly cut hay in their hair,
he reminded himself that people came in with the church,
and people went out with the church.
Now they just go out.
He had his work cut out for him.
That much he knew.
That much he knew for sure.

HYMN

One by one,
in the stony silence of the nearly dark cathedral

the choir boys proceeded from the domed apse
pass the altar to the high, massive doors
opening to the West.

The procession did not so much move
as float, the young feet whispering
in a measured hush rehearsed and mastered
and passed on over many, many centuries.

One by one,
the boys extinguished their candles
in a perfect single minimalist rhythmic puff.

And so, one by one,
what began as a circle of light became a serpent unfolding
into a straight line which grew shorter
and shorter, contracting into a solitary point
which seemed to hold all that has ever been
and ever shall be of time.

As the last candle was blown out,
a darkness fell heavily upon the floor
just as a collective sigh rose,
an out-breathing of some commonly held grief,
a sadness which cannot be expressed when we are alone.

One by one, without a sound,
those gathered together stood and began

to walk out the massive doors facing West.
So the smaller infinity inside the cathedral
gave way into the larger infinity of the evening,
—an evening resting motionless in the great cycle of seasons,
neither the end of winter nor the beginning of spring—
and into the gentle, forgiving hands
that seemed to hold them both.

*Snow Wiki Camp,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
II.11.2009*



View to Elkhorns . . .
On the road in the American Northwest.



The Elkhorns, across January Inversion . . . | [buy this photo](#) |
On the road in the American Northwest.

Here is a little set of seven 37-step poems which dances around the theme color, especially color in mountain winter.

In order for a variation form like this to really work, one needs to do them in sets or sequences. Try reading them out-loud to get a sense of how the rhythms and accents change in surprising ways while still keeping to the basic 37-step pattern.

You might well be wondering, "*Well, why 37 and not 50 or 100 or [17 steps](#) (as in Haiku)?*" I can only say that it's the smallest form I've been able to come up with that has a potential center, a point around which the all the sounds of the little poems turn. This particular sequence was written especially for a musical piece I have in mind for Mezzo-soprano & OCTET:

COLORS

(I)

Red means life, as well
as death; it means against
a background of black: pay careful

attention.

Red is love, is sex.
Red means: *You! Get ready for change!*

(II)

Blue is the color
of cool reason, of balance, of
contemplation. The temple of

peace has no

color, although some
say that blue may show us the way.

(III)

Green is growth, not of
money, but of meaning, of leaves.
The shepherd's wife wears green in spring.

Flowers tend

away from true green,
but then, they don't last quite as long.

(IV)

Pink is the color
of nurturing hope, of the stars
reflected in a young girl's eyes,

of balloons

released atop a
snowy mountain, lighter than air.

(V)

Azure is the color
of the sagebrush steppe at sunlight.
O sky! Thin sphere of life above,

more mood than

color, more warning,
admonition, more prophecy!

(VI)

Fiery orange-red of
the fortissimo of Varèse,
the pianissimo *violet*

of Webern.

O movement of sound,
An arched rainbow bridging extremes.

(VII)

Snow is not white; it
is a thousand colors, none of
which have a name, save the

sugar white

of touristland; it—
is melting away as we speak.

*Il. 12.2009,
Snow Wiki Camp,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,*



Winter Camp, view West to Sparta Butte | [buy this photo](#) |

Stable high-pressure weather and good, safe snow. What more can one ask!
To get up to the wilderness from here is another two-day trek.

On the road in the American Northwest.

WINTER LINES

The lines of winter
lie tightly together
like buds tucked close
against a leafless twig.
Stopping short of snow,
of cold:—
seeds of crystals,
of new ideas,
listening
for the chance,
just the chance,
of an echo
in the surrounding silence.